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ROBERT BROWNING'S

POETICAL WORKS

THE RING AND THE BOOK

BY

ROBERT BROWNING

IN THREE VOLUMES

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THE RING AND THE BOOK.

1868–9.

V.

COUNT GUIDO FRANCESCHINI.

THANKS, Sir, but, should it please the reverend Court,
I feel I can stand somehow, half sit down
Without help, make shift to even speak, you see,
Fortified by the sip of . . . why, 't is wine,
Velletri,—and not vinegar and gall,
So changed and good the times grow! Thanks, kind Sir!
Oh, but one sip 's enough! I want my head
To save my neck, there 's work awaits me still.
How cautious and considerate . . . aie, aie, aie,
Nor your fault, sweet Sir! Come, you take to heart
An ordinary matter. Law is law.
Noblemen were exempt, the vulgar thought,

From racking; but, since law thinks otherwise,
I have been put to the rack: all 's over now,
And neither wrist—what men style, out of joint:
If any harm be, 't is the shoulder-blade,
The left one, that seems wrong i' the socket,—Sirs.
Much could not happen, I was quick to faint,
Being past my prime of life, and out of health.
In short, I thank you,—yes, and mean the word.
Needs must the Court be slow to understand
How this quite novel form of taking pain,
This getting tortured merely in the flesh,
Amounts to almost an agreeable change
In my case, me fastidious, plied too much
With opposite treatment, used (forgive the joke)
To the rasp-tooth toying with this brain of mine,
And, in and out my heart, the play o' the probe.
Four years have I been operated on
I' the soul, do you see—its tense or tremulous part—
My self-respect, my care for a good name,
Pride in an old one, love of kindred—just
A mother, brothers, sisters, and the like,
That looked up to my face when days were dim,
And fancied they found light there—no one spot,
Foppishly sensitive, but has paid its pang.
That, and not this you now oblige me with,
That was the Vigil-torment, if you please!

The poor old noble House that drew the rags
O' the Franceschini's once superb array
Close round her, hoped to slink unchallenged by,--
Pluck off these ! Turn the drapery inside out
And teach the tittering town how scarlet wears !
Show men the lucklessness, the improvidence
Of the easy-natured Count before this Count,
The father I have some slight feeling for,
Who let the world slide, nor foresaw that friends
Then proud to cap and kiss their patron's shoe,
Would, when the purse he left held spider-webs,
Properly push his child to wall one day !
Mimic the tetchy humour, furtive glance,
And brow where half was furious, half fatigued,
O' the same son got to be of middle age,
Sour, saturnine,—your humble servant here,—
When things go cross and the young wife, he finds
Take to the window at a whistle's bid,
And yet demurs thereon, preposterous fool !—
Whereat the worthies judge he wants advice
And beg to civilly ask what 's evil here,
Perhaps remonstrate on the habit they deem
He 's given unduly to, of beating her :
. . . Oh, sure he beats her—why says John so else,
Who is cousin to George who is sib to Tecla's self
Who cooks the meal and combs the lady's hair ?

What! 'T is my wrist you merely dislocate
For the future when you mean me martyrdom?
—Let the old mother's economy alone,
How the brocade-strips saved o' the seamy side
O' the wedding-gown buy raiment for a year?
—How she can dress and dish up—lordly dish
Fit for a duke, lamb's head and purtenance—
With her proud hands, feast household so a week?
No word o' the wine rejoicing God and man
The less when three-parts water? Then, I say,
A trifle of torture to the flesh, like yours,
While soul is spared such foretaste of hell-fire,
Is naught. But I curtail the catalogue
Through policy,—a rhetorician's trick,—
Because I would reserve some choicer points
O' the practice, more exactly parallel
(Having an eye to climax) with what gift,
Eventual grace the Court may have in store
I' the way of plague—what crown of punishments.
When I am hanged or headed, time enough
To prove the tenderness of only that,
Mere heading, hanging,—not their counterpart,
Not demonstration public and precise
That I, having married the mongrel of a drab,
Am bound to grant that mongrel-brat, my wife,
Her mother's birthright-license as is just,—

Let her sleep undisturbed, i' the family style,
Her sleep out in the embraces of a priest,
Nor disallow their bastard as my heir!
Your sole mistake,—dare I submit so much
To the reverend Court?—has been in all this pains
To make a stone roll down hill,—rack and wrench
And rend a man to pieces, all for what?
Why—make him ope mouth in his own defence,
Show cause for what he has done, the irregular deed,
(Since that he did it, scarce dispute can be)
And clear his fame a little, beside the luck
Of stopping even yet, if possible,
Discomfort to his flesh from noose or axe—
For that, out come the implements of law!
May it content my lords the gracious Court
To listen only half so patient-long
As I will in that sense profusely speak,
And—fie, they shall not call in screws to help!
I killed Pompilia Franceschini, Sirs;
Killed too the Comparini, husband, wife,
Who called themselves, by a notorious lie,
Her father and her mother to ruin me.
There 's the irregular deed: you want no more
Than right interpretation of the same,
And truth so far—am I to understand?
To that then, with convenient speed,—because

Now I consider,—yes, despite my boast,
There is an ailing in this omoplat
May clip my speech all too abruptly short,
Whatever the good-will in me. Now for truth!

I' the name of the indivisible Trinity!
Will my lords, in the plenitude of their light,
Weigh well that all this trouble has come on me
Through my persistent treading in the paths
Where I was trained to go,—wearing that yoke
My shoulder was predestined to receive,
Born to the hereditary stoop and crease?
Noble, I recognized my nobler still,
The Church, my suzerain; no mock-mistress, she;
The secular owned the spiritual: mates of mine
Have thrown their careless hoofs up at her call
"Forsake the clover and come drag my wain!"
There they go cropping: I protruded nose
To halter, bent my back of docile beast,
And now am whealed, one wide wound all of me,
For being found at the eleventh hour o' the day
Padding the mill-track, not neck-deep in grass:
—My one fault, I am stiffened by my work,
—My one reward, I help the Court to smile!

I am representative of a great line,

One of the first of the old families
In Arezzo, ancientest of Tuscan towns.
When my worst foe is fain to challenge this,
His worst exception runs—not first in rank
But second, noble in the next degree
Only; not malice' self maligns me more.
So, my lord opposite has composed, we know,
A marvel of a book, sustains the point
That Francis boasts the primacy 'mid saints;
Yet not inaptly hath his argument
Obtained response from yon my other lord
In thesis published with the world's applause
—Rather 't is Dominic such post befits:
Why, at the worst, Francis stays Francis still,
Second in rank to Dominic it may be,
Still, very saintly, very like our Lord;
And I at least descend from Guido once
Homager to the Empire, nought below—
Of which account as proof that, none o' the line
Having a single gift beyond brave blood,
Or able to do aught but give, give, give
In blood and brain, in house and land and cash,
Not get and garner as the vulgar may,
We became poor as Francis or our Lord.
Be that as it likes you, Sirs,—whenever it chanced
Myself grew capable anyway of remark,

(Which was soon—penury makes wit premature)
This struck me, I was poor who should be rich
Or pay that fault to the world which trifles not
When lineage lacks the flag yet lifts the pole:
On, therefore, I must move forthwith, transfer
My stranded self, born fish with gill and fin
Fit for the deep sea, now left flap bare-backed
In slush and sand, a show to crawlers vile
Reared of the low-tide and aright therein.
The enviable youth with the old name,
Wide chest, stout arms, sound brow and pricking veins,
A heartful of desire, man's natural load,
A brainful of belief, the noble's lot,—
All this life, cramped and gasping, high and dry
I' the wave's retreat,—the misery, good my lords,
Which made you merriment at Rome of late,—
It made me reason, rather—muse, demand
—Why our bare dropping palace, in the street
Where such-an-one whose grandfather sold tripe
Was adding to his purchased pile a fourth
Tall tower, could hardly show a turret sound?
Why Countess Beatrice, whose son I am,
Cowered in the winter-time as she spun flax,
Blew on the earthen basket of live ash,
Instead of jaunting forth in coach and six
Like such-another widow who ne'er was wed?

I asked my fellows, how came this about?
"Why, Jack, the suttler's child, perhaps the camp's,
"Went to the wars, fought sturdily, took a town
"And got rewarded as was natural.
"She of the coach and six—excuse me there!
"Why, don't you know the story of her friend?
"A clown dressed vines on somebody's estate,
"His boy recoiled from muck, liked Latin more,
"Stuck to his pen and got to be a priest,
"Till one day . . . don't you mind that telling tract
"Against Molinos, the old Cardinal wrote?
"He penned and dropped it in the patron's desk
"Who, deep in thought and absent much of mind,
"Licensed the thing, allowed it for his own;
"Quick came promotion,—*suum cuique*, Count!
"Oh, he can pay for coach and six, be sure!"
"—Well, let me go, do likewise: war 's the word—
"That way the Franceschini worked at first,
"I 'll take my turn, try soldiership."—"What, you?
"The eldest son and heir and prop o' the house,
"So do you see your duty? Here 's your post,
"Hard by the hearth and altar. (Roam from roof,
"This youngster, play the gipsy out of doors,
"And who keeps kith and kin that fall on us?)
"Stand fast, stick tight, conserve your gods at home!"
"—Well then, the quiet course, the contrary trade!

"We had a cousin amongst us once was Pope,
"And minor glories manifold. Try the Church,
"The tonsure, and,—since heresy 's but half-slain
"Even by the Cardinal's tract he thought he wrote,—
"Have at Molinos!"—"Have at a fool's head!
"You a priest? How were marriage possible?
"There must be Franceschini till time ends—
"That 's your vocation. Make your brothers priests,
"Paul shall be porporate, and Girolamo step
"Red-stockinged in the presence when you choose,
"But save one Franceschini for the age!
"Be not the vine but dig and dung its root,
"Be not a priest but gird up priesthood's loins,
"With one foot in Arezzo stride to Rome,
"Spend yourself there and bring the purchase back!
"Go hence to Rome, be guided!"

So I was.
I turned alike from the hill-side zig-zag thread
Of way to the table-land a soldier takes,
Alike from the low-lying pasture-place
Where churchmen graze, recline and ruminate,
—Ventured to mount no platform like my lords
Who judge the world, bear brain I dare not brag—
But stationed me, might thus the expression serve,
As who should fetch and carry, come and go,

Meddle and make i' the cause my lords love most—
The public weal, which hangs to the law, which holds
By the Church, which happens to be through God himself.
Humbly I helped the Church till here I stand,—
Or would stand but for the omoplat, you see!
Bidden qualify for Rome, I, having a field,
Went, sold it, laid the sum at Peter's foot:
Which means—I settled home-accounts with speed,
Set apart just a modicum should suffice
To hold the villa's head above the waves
Of weed inundating its oil and wine,
And prop roof, stanchion wall o' the palace so
As to keep breath i' the body, out of heart
Amid the advance of neighbouring loftiness—
(People like building where they used to beg)—
Till succoured one day,—shared the residue
Between my mother and brothers and sisters there,
Black-eyed babe Donna This and Donna That,
As near to starving as might decently be,
—Left myself journey-charges, change of suit,
A purse to put i' the pocket of the Groom
O' the Chamber of the patron, and a glove
With a ring to it for the digits of the niece
Sure to be helpful in his household,—then
Started for Rome, and led the life prescribed.

Close to the Church, though clean of it, I assumed
Three or four orders of no consequence,
—They cast out evil spirits and exorcise,
For example; bind a man to nothing more,
Give clerical savour to his layman's-salt,
Facilitate his claim to loaf and fish
Should miracle leave, beyond what feeds the flock,
Fragments to brim the basket of a friend—
While, for the world's sake, I rode, danced and gamed,
Quitted me like a courtier, measured mine
With whatsoever blade had fame in fence,
—Ready to let the basket go its round
Even though my turn was come to help myself,
Should Dives count on me at dinner-time
As just the understander of a joke
And not immoderate in repartee.
Utrique sic paratus, Sirs, I said,
"Here," (in the fortitude of years fifteen,
So good a pedagogue is penury)
"Here wait, do service,—serving and to serve!
"And, in due time, I nowise doubt at all,
"The recognition of my service comes.
"Next year I 'm only sixteen. I can wait."

I waited thirty years, may it please the Court:
Saw meanwhile many a denizen o' the dung

Hop, skip, jump o'er my shoulder, make him wings
And fly aloft,—succeed, in the usual phrase.
Everyone soon or late comes round by Rome:
Stand still here, you 'll see all in turn succeed.
Why, look you, so and so, the physician here,
My father's lacquey's son we sent to school,
Doctored and dosed this Eminence and that,
Salved the last Pope his certain obstinate sore,
Soon bought land as became him, names it now:
I grasp bell at his griffin-guarded gate,
Traverse the half-mile avenue,—a term,
A cypress, and a statue, three and three,—
Deliver message from my Monsignor,
With varletry at lounge i' the vestibule
I 'm barred from who bear mud upon my shoe.
My father's chaplain's nephew, Chamberlain,—
Nothing less, please you!—courteous all the same,
—He does not see me though I wait an hour
At his staircase-landing 'twixt the brace of busts,
A noseless Sylla, Marius maimed to match,
My father gave him for a hexastich
Made on my birthday,—but he sends me down,
To make amends, that relic I prize most—
The unburnt end o' the very candle, Sirs,
Purfled with paint so prettily round and round,
He carried in such state last Peter's-day,—

In token I, his gentleman and squire,
Had held the bridle, walked his managed mule
Without a tittup the procession through.
Nay, the official,—one you know, sweet lords!—
Who drew the warrant for my transfer late
To the New Prisons from Tordinona,—he
Graciously had remembrance—"Francesc . . . ha?
"His sire, now—how a thing shall come about!—
"Paid me a dozen florins above the fee,
"For drawing deftly up a deed of sale
"When troubles fell so thick on him, good heart,
"And I was prompt and pushing! By all means!
"At the New Prisons be it his son shall lie,—
"Anything for an old friend!" and thereat
Signed name with triple flourish underneath.
These were my fellows, such their fortunes now,
While I—kept fasts and feasts innumerable,
Matins and vespers, functions to no end
I' the train of Monsignor and Eminence,
As gentleman-squire, and for my zeal's reward
Have rarely missed a place at the table-foot
Except when some Ambassador, or such like,
Brought his own people. Brief, one day I felt
The tick of time inside me, turning-point
And slight sense there was now enough of this:
That I was near my seventh climacteric,

Hard upon, if not over, the middle life,
And, although fed by the east-wind, fulsome-fine
With foretaste of the Land of Promise, still
My gorge gave symptom it might play me false;
Better not press it further,—be content
With living and dying only a nobleman,
Who merely had a father great and rich,
Who simply had one greater and richer yet,
And so on back and back till first and best
Began i' the night; I finish in the day.
" The mother must be getting old," I said;
" The sisters are well wedded away, our name
" Can manage to pass a sister off, at need,
" And do for dowry: both my brothers thrive—
" Regular priests they are, nor, bat-like, 'bide
" 'Twixt flesh and fowl with neither privilege.
" My spare revenue must keep me and mine.
" I am tired: Arezzo's air is good to breathe;
" Vittiano,—one limes flocks of thrushes there;
" A leathern coat costs little and lasts long:
" Let me bid hope good-bye, content at home!"
Thus, one day, I disbosomed me and bowed.
Whereat began the little buzz and thrill
O' the gazers round me; each face brightened up:
As when at your Casino, deep in dawn,
A gamester says at last, " I play no more,

" Forego gain, acquiesce in loss, withdraw
" Anyhow : " and the watchers of his ways,
A trifle struck compunctious at the word,
Yet sensible of relief, breathe free once more,
Break up the ring, venture polite advice—
" How, Sir? So scant of heart and hope indeed?
" Retire with neither cross nor pile from play?—
" So incurious, so short-casting?—give your chance
" To a younger, stronger, bolder spirit belike,
" Just when luck turns and the fine throw sweeps all?"
Such was the chorus : and its goodwill meant—
" See that the loser leave door handsomely!
" There 's an ill look,—it 's sinister, spoils sport,
" When an old bruised and battered year-by-year
" Fighter with fortune, not a penny in poke,
" Reels down the steps of our establishment
" And staggers on broad daylight and the world,
" In shagrag beard and doleful doublet, drops
" And breaks his heart on the outside : people prate
" ' Such is the profit of a trip upstairs! '
" Contrive he sidle forth, baulked of the blow
" Best dealt by way of moral, bidding down
" No curse but blessings rather on our heads
" For some poor prize he bears at tattered breast,
" Some palpable sort of kind of good to set
" Over and against the grievance : give him quick!"

Whereon protested Paul, "Go hang yourselves!
"Leave him to me. Count Guido and brother of mine,
"A word in your ear! Take courage, since faint heart
"Ne'er won . . . aha, fair lady, don't men say?
"There 's a *sors*, there 's a right Virgilian dip!
"Do you see the happiness o' the hint? At worst,
"If the Church want no more of you, the Court
"No more, and the Camp as little, the ingrates,—come,
"Count you are counted: still you 've coat to back,
"Not cloth of gold and tissue, as we hoped,
"But cloth with sparks and spangles on its frieze
"From Camp, Court, Church, enough to make a shine,
"Entitle you to carry home a wife
"With the proper dowry, let the worst betide!
"Why, it was just a wife you meant to take!"

Now, Paul's advice was weighty: priests should know:
And Paul apprised me, ere the week was out,
That Pietro and Violante, the easy pair,
The cits enough, with stomach to be more,
Had just the daughter and exact the sum
To truck for the quality of myself: "She 's young,
"Pretty and rich: you 're noble, classic, choice.
"Is it to be a match?" "A match," said I.
Done! He proposed all, I accepted all,
And we performed all. So I said and did

Simply. As simply followed, not at first
But with the outbreak of misfortune, still
One comment on the saying and doing—"What?
" No blush at the avowal you dared buy
" A girl of age beseems your granddaughter,
" Like ox or ass? Are flesh and blood a ware?
" Are heart and soul a chattel?"
Softly, Sirs!
Will the Court of its charity teach poor me
Anxious to learn, of any way i' the world,
Allowed by custom and convenience, save
This same which, taught from my youth up, I trod?
Take me along with you; where was the wrong step?
If what I gave in barter, style and state
And all that hangs to Franceschinihood,
Were worthless,—why, society goes to ground,
Its rules are idiot's-rambling. Honour of birth,—
If that thing has no value, cannot buy
Something with value of another sort,
You 've no reward nor punishment to give
I' the giving or the taking honour; straight
Your social fabric, pinnacle to base,
Comes down a-clatter like a house of cards.
Get honour, and keep honour free from flaw,
Aim at still higher honour,—gabble o' the goose!
Go bid a second blockhead like myself

Spend fifty years in guarding bubbles of breath,
Soapsuds with air i' the belly, gilded brave,
Guarded and guided, all to break at touch
O' the first young girl's hand and first old fool's purse!
All my privation and endurance, all
Love, loyalty and labour dared and did,
Fiddle-de-dee!—why, doer and darer both,—
Count Guido Franceschini had hit the mark
Far better, spent his life with more effect,
As a dancer or a prizer, trades that pay!
On the other hand, bid this buffoonery cease,
Admit that honour is a privilege,
The question follows, privilege worth what?
Why, worth the market-price,—now up, now down,
Just so with this as with all other ware:
Therefore essay the market, sell your name,
Style and condition to who buys them best!
"Does my name purchase," had I dared inquire,
"Your niece, my lord?" there would have been rebuff
Though courtesy, your Lordship cannot else—
"Not altogether! Rank for rank may stand:
"But I have wealth beside, you—poverty;
"Your scale flies up there: bid a second bid
"Rank too and wealth too!" Reasoned like yourself!
But was it to you I went with goods to sell?
This time 't was my scale quietly kissed the ground,

Mere rank against mere wealth—some youth beside,
Some beauty too, thrown into the bargain, just
As the buyer likes or lets alone. I thought
To deal o' the square: others find fault, it seems:
The thing is, those my offer most concerned,
Pietro, Violante, cried they fair or foul?
What did they make o' the terms? Preposterous terms?
Why then accede so promptly, close with such
Nor take a minute to chaffer? Bargain struck,
They straight grew bilious, wished their money back,
Repented them, no doubt: why, so did I,
So did your Lordship, if town-talk be true,
Of paying a full farm's worth for that piece
By Pietro of Cortona—probably
His scholar Ciro Ferri may have retouched—
You caring more for colour than design—
Getting a little tired of cupids too.
That 's incident to all the folk who buy!
I am charged, I know, with gilding fact by fraud;
I falsified and fabricated, wrote
Myself down roughly richer than I prove,
Rendered a wrong revenue,—grant it all!
Mere grace, mere coquetry such fraud, I say:
A flourish round the figures of a sum
For fashion's sake, that deceives nobody.
The veritable back-bone, understood

Essence of this same bargain, blank and bare,
Being the exchange of quality for wealth,—
What may such fancy-flights be? Flecks of oil
Flirted by chapmen where plain dealing grates.
I may have dripped a drop—"My name I sell;
"Not but that I too boast my wealth"—as they,
"—We bring you riches; still our ancestor
"Was hardly the rapscallion folk saw flogged,
"But heir to we know who, were rights of force!"
They knew and I knew where the backbone lurked
I' the writhings of the bargain, lords, believe!
I paid down all engaged for, to a doit,
Delivered them just that which, their life long,
They hungered in the hearts of them to gain—
Incorporation with nobility thus
In word and deed: for that they gave me wealth.
But when they came to try their gain, my gift,
Quit Rome and qualify for Arezzo, take
The tone o' the new sphere that absorbed the old,
Put away gossip Jack and goody Joan
And go become familiar with the Great,
Greatness to touch and taste and handle now,—
Why then,—they found that all was vanity,
Vexation, and what Solomon describes!
The old abundant city-fare was best,
The kindly warmth o' the commons, the glad clap

Of the equal on the shoulder, the frank grin
Of the underling at all so many spoons
Fire-new at neighbourly treat,—best, best and best
Beyond compare!—down to the loll itself
O' the pot-house settle,—better such a bench
Than the stiff crucifixion by my dais
Under the piecemeal damask canopy
With the coroneted coat of arms a-top!
Poverty and privation for pride's sake,
All they engaged to easily brave and bear,—
With the fit upon them and their brains a-work,—
Proved unendurable to the sobered sots.
A banished prince, now, will exude a juice
And salamander-like support the flame:
He dines on chestnuts, chucks the husks to help
The broil o' the brazier, pays the due baioc,
Goes off light-hearted: his grimace begins
At the funny humours of the christening-feast
Of friend the money-lender,—then he 's touched
By the flame and frizzles at the babe to kiss!
Here was the converse trial, opposite mind:
Here did a petty nature split on rock
Of vulgar wants predestinate for such—
One dish at supper and weak wine to boot!
The prince had grinned and borne: the citizen shrieked,
Summoned the neighbourhood to attest the wrong,

Made noisy protest he was murdered,—stoned
And burned and drowned and hanged,—then broke away,
He and his wife, to tell their Rome the rest.
And this you admire, you men o' the world, my lords?
This moves compassion, makes you doubt my faith?
Why, I appeal to . . . sun and moon? Not I!
Rather to Plautus, Terence, Boccaccio's Book,
My townsman, frank Ser Franco's merry Tales.—
To all who strip a vizard from a face,
A body from its padding, and a soul
From froth and ignorance it styles itself,—
If this be other than the daily hap
Of purblind greed that dog-like still drops bone,
Grasps shadow, and then howls the case is hard!

So much for them so far: now for myself,
My profit or loss i' the matter: married am I:
Text whereon friendly censors burst to preach.
Ay, at Rome even, long ere I was left
To regulate her life for my young bride
Alone at Arezzo, friendliness outbroke
(Sifting my future to predict its fault)
"Purchase and sale being thus so plain a point,
"How of a certain soul bound up, may-be,
"I' the barter with the body and money-bags?
"From the bride's soul what is it you expect?"

Why, loyalty and obedience,—wish and will
To settle and suit her fresh and plastic mind
To the novel, not disadvantageous mould!
Father and mother shall the woman leave,
Cleave to the husband, be it for weal or woe:
There is the law: what sets this law aside
In my particular case? My friends submit
"Guide, guardian, benefactor,—fee, faw, fum,
"The fact is you are forty-five years old,
"Nor very comely even for that age:
"Girls must have boys." Why, let girls say so then,
Nor call the boys and men, who say the same,
Brute this and beast the other as they do!
Come, cards on table! When you chaunt us next
Epithalamium full to overflow
With praise and glory of white womanhood,
The chaste and pure—troll no such lies o'er lip!
Put in their stead a crudity or two,
Such short and simple statement of the case
As youth chalks on our walls at spring of year!
No! I shall still think nobler of the sex,
Believe a woman still may take a man
For the short period that his soul wears flesh,
And, for the soul's sake, understand the fault
Of armour frayed by fighting. Tush, it tempts
One's tongue too much! I 'll say—the law 's the law:

With a wife I look to find all wifeliness,
As when I buy, timber and twig, a tree—
I buy the song o' the nightingale inside.

Such was the pact: Pompilia from the first
Broke it, refused from the beginning day
Either in body or soul to cleave to mine,
And published it forthwith to all the world.
No rupture,—you must join ere you can break,—
Before we had cohabited a month
She found I was a devil and no man,—
Made common cause with those who found as much,
Her parents, Pietro and Violante,—moved
Heaven and earth to the rescue of all three.
In four months' time, the time o' the parents' stay,
Arezzo was a-ringing, bells in a blaze,
With the unimaginable story rife
I' the mouth of man, woman and child—to-wit
My misdemeanour. First the lighter side,
Ludicrous face of things,—how very poor
The Franceschini had become at last,
The meanness and the misery of each shift
To save a soldo, stretch and make ends meet.
Next, the more hateful aspect,—how myself
With cruelty beyond Caligula's
Had stripped and beaten, robbed and murdered them,

The good old couple, I decoyed, abused,
Plundered and then cast out, and happily so,
Since,—in due course the abominable comes,—
Woe worth the poor young wife left lonely here!
Repugnant in my person as my mind,
I sought,—was ever heard of such revenge?
—To lure and bind her to so cursed a couch,
Such co-embrace with sulphur, snake and toad,
That she was fain to rush forth, call the stones
O' the common street to save her, not from hate
Of mine merely, but . . . must I burn my lips
With the blister of the lie? . . . the satyr-love
Of who but my own brother, the young priest,
Too long enforced to lenten fare belike,
Now tempted by the morsel tossed him full
I' the trencher where lay bread and herbs at best.
Mark, this yourselves say!—this, none disallows,
Was charged to me by the universal voice
At the instigation of my four-months' wife!—
And then you ask "Such charges so preferred,
"(Truly or falsely, here concerns us not)
"Pricked you to punish now if not before?—
"Did not the harshness double itself, the hate
"Harden?" I answer "Have it your way and will!"
Say my resentment grew apace: what then?
Do you cry out on the marvel? When I find

That pure smooth egg which, laid within my nest,
Could not but hatch a comfort to us all,
Issues a cockatrice for me and mine,
Do you stare to see me stamp on it? Swans are soft:
Is it not clear that she you call my wife,
That any wife of any husband, caught
Whetting a sting like this against his breast,—
Speckled with fragments of the fresh-broke shell,
Married a month and making outcry thus,—
Proves a plague-prodigy to God and man?
She married: what was it she married for,
Counted upon and meant to meet thereby?
"Love" suggests some one, "love, a little word
"Whereof we have not heard one syllable."
So, the Pompilia, child, girl, wife, in one,
Wanted the beating pulse, the rolling eye,
The frantic gesture, the devotion due
From Thyrsis to Neæra! Guido's love—
Why not Provençal roses in his shoe,
Plume to his cap, and trio of guitars
At casement, with a bravo close beside?
Good things all these are, clearly claimable
When the fit price is paid the proper way.
Had it been some friend's wife, now, threw her fan
At my foot, with just this pretty scrap attached,
"Shame, death, damnation—fall these as they may,

"So I find you, for a minute! Come this eve!"
—Why, at such sweet self-sacrifice,—who knows?
I might have fired up, found me at my post,
Ardent from head to heel, nor feared catch cough.
Nay, had some other friend's . . . say, daughter, tripped
Upstairs and tumbled flat and frank on me,
Bareheaded and barefooted, with loose hair
And garments all at large,—cried "Take me thus!
"Duke So-and-So, the greatest man in Rome—
"To escape his hand and heart have I broke bounds,
"Traversed the town and reached you!"—then, indeed,
The lady had not reached a man of ice!
I would have rummaged, ransacked at the word
Those old odd corners of an empty heart
For remnants of dim love the long disused,
And dusty crumblings of romance! But here,
We talk of just a marriage, if you please—
The every-day conditions and no more;
Where do these bind me to bestow one drop
Of blood shall dye my wife's true-love-knot pink?
Pompilia was no pigeon, Venus' pet,
That shuffled from between her pressing paps
To sit on my rough shoulder,—but a hawk,
I bought at a hawk's price and carried home
To do hawk's service—at the Rotunda, say,
Where, six o' the callow nestlings in a row,

You pick and choose and pay the price for such.
I have paid my pound, await my penny's worth,
So, hoodwink, starve and properly train my bird,
And, should she prove a haggard,—twist her neck!
Did I not pay my name and style, my hope
And trust, my all? Through spending these amiss
I am here! 'T is scarce the gravity of the Court
Will blame me that I never piped a tune,
Treated my falcon-gentle like my finch.
The obligation I incurred was just
To practise mastery, prove my mastership:—
Pompilia's duty was—submit herself,
Afford me pleasure, perhaps cure my bile.
Am I to teach my lords what marriage means,
What God ordains thereby and man fulfils
Who, docile to the dictate, treads the house?
My lords have chosen the happier part with Paul
And neither marry nor burn,—yet priestliness
Can find a parallel to the marriage-bond
In its own blessed special ordinance
Whereof indeed was marriage made the type:
The Church may show her insubordinate,
As marriage her refractory. How of the Monk
Who finds the claustral regimen too sharp
After the first month's essay? What 's the mode
With the Deacon who supports indifferently

The rod o' the Bishop when he tastes its smart
Full four weeks? Do you straightway slacken hold
Of the innocents, the all-unwary ones
Who, eager to profess, mistook their mind?—
Remit a fast-day's rigour to the Monk
Who fancied Francis' manna meant roast quails,—
Concede the Deacon sweet society,
He never thought the Levite-rule renounced,—
Or rather prescribe short chain and sharp scourge
Corrective of such peccant humours? This—
I take to be the Church's mode, and mine.
If I was over-harsh,—the worse i' the wife
Who did not win from harshness as she ought,
Wanted the patience and persuasion, lore
Of love, should cure me and console herself.
Put case that I mishandle, flurry and fright
My hawk through clumsiness in sportsmanship,
Twitch out five pens where plucking one would serve—
What, shall she bite and claw to mend the case?
And, if you find I pluck five more for that,
Shall you weep "How he roughs the turtle there"?

Such was the starting; now of the further step.
In lieu of taking penance in good part,
The Monk, with hue and cry, summons a mob
To make a bonfire of the convent, say,—

And the Deacon's pretty piece of virtue (save
The ears o' the Court! I try to save my head)
Instructed by the ingenuous postulant,
Taxes the Bishop with adultery, (mud
Needs must pair off with mud, and filth with filth)—
Such being my next experience. Who knows not—
The couple, father and mother of my wife,
Returned to Rome, published before my lords,
Put into print, made circulate far and wide
That they had cheated me who cheated them?
Pompilia, I supposed their daughter, drew
Breath first 'mid Rome's worst rankness, through the deed
Of a drab and a rogue, was by-blow bastard-babe
Of a nameless strumpet, passed off, palmed on me
As the daughter with the dowry. Daughter? Dirt
O' the kennel! Dowry? Dust o' the street! Nought more,
Nought less, nought else but—oh—ah—assuredly
A Franceschini and my very wife!
Now take this charge as you will, for false or true,—
This charge, preferred before your very selves
Who judge me now,—I pray you, adjudge again,
Classing it with the cheats or with the lies,
By which category I suffer most!
But of their reckoning, theirs who dealt with me
In either fashion,—I reserve my word,

Justify that in its place; I am now to say,
Whichever point o' the charge might poison most,
Pompilia's duty was no doubtful one.
You put the protestation in her mouth
"Henceforward and forevermore, avaunt
"Ye fiends, who drop disguise and glare revealed
"In your own shape, no longer father mine
"Nor mother mine! Too nakedly you hate
"Me whom you looked as if you loved once,—me
"Whom, whether true or false, your tale now damns,
"Divulged thus to my public infamy,
"Private perdition, absolute overthrow.
"For, hate my husband to your hearts' content,
"I, spoil and prey of you from first to last,
"I who have done you the blind service, lured
"The lion to your pitfall,—I, thus left
"To answer for my ignorant bleating there,
"I should have been remembered and withdrawn
"From the first o' the natural fury, not flung loose
"A proverb and a by-word men will mouth
"At the cross-way, in the corner, up and down
"Rome and Arezzo,—there, full in my face,
"If my lord, missing them and finding me,
"Content himself with casting his reproach
"To drop i' the street where such impostors die.
"Ah, but—that husband, what the wonder were!—

"If, far from casting thus away the rag
"Smeared with the plague his hand had chanced upon,
"Sewn to his pillow by Locusta's wile,—
"Far from abolishing, root, stem and branch,
"The misgrowth of infectious mistletoe
"Foisted into his stock for honest graft,—
"If he repudiate not, renounce nowise,
"But, guarding, guiding me, maintain my cause
"By making it his own, (what other way?)
"—To keep my name for me, he call it his,
"Claim it of who would take it by their lie,—
"To save my wealth for me—or babe of mine
"Their lie was framed to beggar at the birth—
"He bid them loose grasp, give our gold again:
"If he become no partner with the pair
"Even in a game which, played adroitly, gives
"Its winner life's great wonderful new chance,—
"Of marrying, to-wit, a second time,—
"Ah, if he did thus, what a friend were he!
"Anger he might show,—who can stamp out flame
"Yet spread no black o' the brand?—yet, rough albeit
"In the act, as whose bare feet feel embers scorch,
"What grace were his, what gratitude were mine!"
Such protestation should have been my wife's.
Looking for this, do I exact too much?
Why, here 's the,—word for word, so much, no more,—

Avowal she made, her pure spontaneous speech
To my brother the Abate at first blush,
Ere the good impulse had begun to fade:
So did she make confession for the pair,
So pour forth praises in her own behalf.
"Ay, the false letter," interpose my lords—
"The simulated writing,—'t was a trick:
"You traced the signs, she merely marked the same,
"The product was not hers but yours." Alack,
I want no more impulsion to tell truth
From the other trick, the torture inside there!
I confess all—let it be understood—
And deny nothing! If I baffle you so,
Can so fence, in the plenitude of right,
That my poor lathen dagger puts aside
Each pass o' the Bilboa, beats you all the same,—
What matters inefficiency of blade?
Mine and not hers the letter,—conceded, lords!
Impute to me that practice!—take as proved
I taught my wife her duty, made her see
What it behoved her see and say and do,
Feel in her heart and with her tongue declare,
And, whether sluggish or recalcitrant,
Forced her to take the right step, I myself
Was narching in marital rectitude!
Why who finds fault here, say the tale be true?

Would not my lords commend the priest whose zeal
Seized on the sick, morose or moribund,
By the palsy-smitten finger, made it cross
His brow correctly at the critical time?
—Or answered for the inarticulate babe
At baptism, in its stead declared the faith,
And saved what else would perish unprofessed?
True, the incapable hand may rally yet,
Renounce the sign with renovated strength,—
The babe may grow up man and Molinist,—
And so Pompilia, set in the good path
And left to go alone there, soon might see
That too frank-forward, all too simple-straight
Her step was, and decline to tread the rough,
When here lay, tempting foot, the meadow-side,
And there the coppice rang with singing-birds!
Soon she discovered she was young and fair,
That many in Arezzo knew as much.
Yes, this next cup of bitterness, my lords,
Had to begin go filling, drop by drop,
Its measure up of full disgust for me,
Filtered into by every noisome drain—
Society's sink toward which all moisture runs.
Would not you prophesy—"She on whose brow is stamped
"The note of the imputation that we know,—
"Rightly or wrongly mothered with a whore,—

"Such an one, to disprove the frightful charge,
"What will she but exaggerate chastity,
"Err in excess of wifehood, as it were,
"Renounce even levities permitted youth,
"Though not youth struck to age by a thunderbolt?
"Cry 'wolf' i' the sheepfold, where 's the sheep dares bleat,
"Knowing the shepherd listens for a growl?"
So you expect. How did the devil decree?
Why, my lords, just the contrary of course!
It was in the house from the window, at the church
From the hassock,—where the theatre lent its lodge,
Or staging for the public show left space,—
That still Pompilia needs must find herself
Launching her looks forth, letting looks reply
As arrows to a challenge; on all sides
Ever new contribution to her lap,
Till one day, what is it knocks at my clenched teeth
But the cup full, curse-collected all for me?
And I must needs drink, drink this gallant's praise,
That minion's prayer, the other fop's reproach,
And come at the dregs to—Caponsacchi! Sirs,
I,—chin-deep in a marsh of misery,
Struggling to extricate my name and fame
And fortune from the marsh would drown them all,
My face the sole unstrangled part of me,—

I must have this new gad-fly in that face,
Must free me from the attacking lover too!
Men say I battled ungracefully enough—
Was harsh, uncouth and ludicrous beyond
The proper part o' the husband: have it so!
Your lordships are considerate at least—
You order me to speak in my defence
Plainly, expect no quavering tuneful trills
As when you bid a singer solace you,—
Nor look that I shall give it, for a grace,
Stans pede in uno:—you remember well
In the one case, 't is a plainsong too severe,
This story of my wrongs,—and that I ache
And need a chair, in the other. Ask you me
Why, when I felt this trouble flap my face,
Already pricked with every shame could perch,—
When, with her parents, my wife plagued me too,—
Why I enforced not exhortation mild
To leave whore's-tricks and let my brows alone,
With mulct of comfits, promise of perfume?

"Far from that! No, you took the opposite course,
"Breathed threatenings, rage and slaughter!" What you will!
And the end has come, the doom is verily here,
Unhindered by the threatening. See fate's flare

Full on each face of the dead guilty three!
Look at them well, and now, lords, look at this!
Tell me: if on that day when I found first
That Caponsacchi thought the nearest way
To his church was some half-mile round by my door,
And that he so admired, shall I suppose,
The manner of the swallows' come-and-go
Between the props o' the window over-head,—
That window happening to be my wife's,—
As to stand gazing by the hour on high,
Of May-eves, while she sat and let him smile,—
If I,—instead of threatening, talking big,
Showing hair-powder, a prodigious pinch,
For poison in a bottle,—making believe
At desperate doings with a bauble-sword,
And other bugaboo-and-baby-work,—
Had, with the vulgarest household implement,
Calmly and quietly cut off, clean thro' bone
But one joint of one finger of my wife,
Saying "For listening to the serenade,
"Here 's your ring-finger shorter a full third:
"Be certain I will slice away next joint,
"Next time that anybody underneath
"Seems somehow to be sauntering as he hoped
"A flower would eddy out of your hand to his
"While you please fidget with the branch above

"O' the rose-tree in the terrace!"—had I done so,
Why, there had followed a quick sharp scream, some pain,
Much calling for plaister, damage to the dress,
A somewhat sulky countenance next day,
Perhaps reproaches,—but reflections too!
I don't hear much of harm that Malchus did
After the incident of the ear, my lords!
Saint Peter took the efficacious way;
Malchus was sore but silenced for his life:
He did not hang himself i' the Potter's Field
Like Judas, who was trusted with the bag
And treated to sops after he proved a thief.
So, by this time, my true and obedient wife
Might have been telling beads with a gloved hand;
Awkward a little at pricking hearts and darts
On sampler possibly, but well otherwise:
Not where Rome shudders now to see her lie.
I give that for the course a wise man takes;
I took the other however, tried the fool's,
The lighter remedy, brandished rapier dread
With cork-ball at the tip, boxed Malchus' ear
Instead of severing the cartilage,
Called her a terrible nickname, and the like,
And there an end: and what was the end of that?
What was the good effect o' the gentle course?
Why, one night I went drowsily to bed,

Dropped asleep suddenly, not suddenly woke,
But did wake with rough rousing and loud cry,
To find noon in my face, a crowd in my room,
Fumes in my brain, fire in my thoat, my wife
Gone God knows whither,—rifled vesture-chest,
And ransacked money-coffer. "What does it mean?"
The servants had been drugged too, stared and yawned
"It must be that our lady has eloped!"
—"Whither and with whom?"—"With whom but the
Canon's self?
"One recognizes Caponsacchi there!"—
(By this time the admiring neighbourhood
Joined chorus round me while I rubbed my eyes)
"'T is months since their intelligence began,—
"A comedy the town was privy to,—
"He wrote and she wrote, she spoke, he replied,
"And going in and out your house last night
"Was easy work for one . . . to be plain with you . . .
"Accustomed to do both, at dusk and dawn
"When you were absent,—at the villa, you know,
"Where husbandry required the master-mind.
"Did not you know? Why, we all knew, you see!"
And presently, bit by bit, the full and true
Particulars of the tale were volunteered
With all the breathless zeal of friendship—"Thus
"Matters were managed: at the seventh hour of night" . .

—" Later, at daybreak " . . . "Caponsacchi came " . . .
—" While you and all your household slept like death,
" Drugged as your supper was with drowsy stuff " . . .
—" And your own cousin Guillichini too—
" Either or both entered your dwelling-place,
" Plundered it at their pleasure, made prize of all,
" Including your wife . . ."—" Oh, your wife led the way,
" Out of doors, on to the gate . . ."—" But gates are shut,
" In a decent town, to darkness and such deeds:
" They climbed the wall—your lady must be lithe—
" At the gap, the broken bit . . . " —" Torrione, true!
" To escape the questioning guard at the proper gate,
" Clemente, where at the inn, hard by, ' the Horse,'
" Just outside, a calash in readiness
" Took the two principals, all alone at last,
" To gate San Spirito, which o'erlooks the road,
" Leads to Perugia, Rome and liberty."
Bit by bit thus made-up mosaic-wise,
Flat lay my fortune,—tesselated floor,
Imperishable tracery devils should foot
And frolic it on, around my broken gods,
Over my desecrated hearth.
So much
For the terrible effect of threatening, Sirs!

Well, this way I was shaken wide awake,
Doctored and drenched, somewhat unpoisoned so.
Then, set on horseback and bid seek the lost,
I started alone, head of me, heart of me
Fire, and each limb as languid . . . ah, sweet lords,
Bethink you!—poison-torture, try persuade
The next refractory Molinist with that! . . .
Floundered thro' day and night, another day
And yet another night, and so at last,
As Lucifer kept falling to find hell,
Tumbled into the court-yard of an inn
At the end, and fell on whom I thought to find,
Even Caponsacchi,—what part once was priest,
Cast to the winds now with the cassock-rags.
In cape and sword a cavalier confessed,
There stood he chiding dilatory grooms,
Chafing that only horseflesh and no team
Of eagles would supply the last relay,
Whirl him along the league, the one post more
Between the couple and Rome and liberty.
'T was dawn, the couple were rested in a sort,
And though the lady, tired,—the tenderer sex,—
Still lingered in her chamber,—to adjust
The limp hair, look for any blush astray,—
She would descend in a twinkling,—"Have you out
"The horses therefore!"

So did I find my wife.
Is the case complete? Do your eyes here see with mine?
Even the parties dared deny no one
Point out of all these points.
What follows next?
" Why, that then was the time," you interpose,
" Or then or never, while the fact was fresh,
" To take the natural vengeance: there and thus
" They and you,—somebody had stuck a sword
" Beside you while he pushed you on your horse,—
" 'T was requisite to slay the couple, Count!"
Just so my friends say. " Kill!" they cry in a breath,
Who presently, when matters grow to a head
And I do kill the offending ones indeed,—
When crime of theirs, only surmised before,
Is patent, proved indisputably now,—
When remedy for wrong, untried at the time,
Which law professes shall not fail a friend,
Is thrice tried now, found threefold worse than null,—
When what might turn to transient shade, who knows?
Solidifies into a blot which breaks
Hell's black off in pale flakes for fear of mine,—
Then, when I claim and take revenge—" So rash?"
They cry—" so little reverence for the law?"

Listen, my masters, and distinguish here!

At first, I called in law to act and help:
Seeing I did so, "Why, 't is clear," they cry,
"You shrank from gallant readiness and risk,
"Were coward: the thing 's inexplicable else."
Sweet my lords, let the thing be! I fall flat,
Play the reed, not the oak, to breath of man.
Only inform my ignorance! Say I stand
Convicted of the having been afraid,
Proved a poltroon, no lion but a lamb,—
Does that deprive me of my right of lamb
And give my fleece and flesh to the first wolf?
Are eunuchs, women, children, shieldless quite
Against attack their own timidity tempts?
Cowardice were misfortune and no crime!
—Take it that way, since I am fallen so low
I scarce dare brush the fly that blows my face,
And thank the man who simply spits not there,—
Unless the Court be generous, comprehend
How one brought up at the very feet of law
As I, awaits the grave Gamaliel's nod
Ere he clench fist at outrage,—much less, stab!
—How, ready enough to rise at the right time,
I still could recognise no time mature
Unsanctioned by a move o' the judgment-seat,
So, mute in misery, eyed my masters here
Motionless till the authoritative word

Pronounced amercement. There 's the riddle solved:
This is just why I slew nor her nor him,
But called in law, law's delegate in the place,
And bade arrest the guilty couple, Sirs!
We had some trouble to do so—you have heard
They braved me,—he with arrogance and scorn,
She, with a volubility of curse,
A conversancy in the skill of tooth
And claw to make suspicion seem absurd,
Nay, an alacrity to put to proof
At my own throat my own sword, teach me so
To try conclusions better the next time,—
Which did the proper service with the mob.
They never tried to put on mask at all:
Two avowed lovers forcibly torn apart,
Upbraid the tyrant as in a playhouse scene,
Ay, and with proper clapping and applause
From the audience that enjoys the bold and free.
I kept still, said to myself, "There 's law!" Anon
We searched the chamber where they passed the night,
Found what confirmed the worst was feared before,
However needless confirmation now—
The witches' circle intact, charms undisturbed
That raised the spirit and succubus,—letters, to-wit,
Love-laden, each the bag o' the bee that bore
Honey from lily and rose to Cupid's hive,—

Now, poetry in some rank blossom-burst,
Now, prose,—" Come here, go there, wait such a while,
" He 's at the villa, now he 's back again :
" We are saved, we are lost, we are lovers all the same ! "
All in order, all complete,—even to a clue
To the drowsiness that happed so opportune—
No mystery, when I read " Of all things, find
" What wine Sir Jealousy decides to drink—
" Red wine ? Because a sleeping-potion, dust
" Dropped into white, discolours wine and shows."

—" Oh, but we did not write a single word !
" Somebody forged the letters in our name !—"
Both in a breath protested presently.
Aha, Sacchetti again !—" Dame,"—quoth the Duke,
" What meaneth this epistle, counsel me,
" I pick from out thy placket and peruse,
" Wherein my page averreth thou art white
" And warm and wonderful 'twixt pap and pap ? "
" Sir," laughed the Lady, " 't is a counterfeit !
" Thy page did never stroke but Dian's breast,
" The pretty hound I nurture for thy sake :
" To lie were losel,—by my fay, no more ! "
And no more say I too, and spare the Court.

Ah, the Court ! yes, I come to the Court's self;

Such the case, so complete in fact and proof,
I laid at the feet of law,—there sat my lords,
Here sit they now, so may they ever sit
In easier attitude than suits my haunch!
In this same chamber did I bare my sores
O' the soul and not the body,—shun no shame,
Shrink from no probing of the ulcerous part,
Since confident in Nature,—which is God,—
That she who, for wise ends, concocts a plague,
Curbs, at the right time, the plague's virulence too:
Law renovates even Lazarus,—cures me!
Cæsar thou seekest? To Cæsar thou shalt go!
Cæsar 's at Rome: to Rome accordingly!

The case was soon decided: both weights, cast
I' the balance, vibrate, neither kicks the beam,
Here away, there away, this now and now that.
To every one o' my grievances law gave
Redress, could purblind eye but see the point.
The wife stood a convicted runagate
From house and husband,—driven to such a course
By what she somehow took for cruelty,
Oppression and imperilment of life—
Not that such things were, but that so they seemed:
Therefore, the end conceded lawful, (since
To save life there 's no risk should stay our leap)

It follows that all means to the lawful end
Are lawful likewise,—poison, theft and flight.
As for the priest's part, did he meddle or make,
Enough that he too thought life jeopardized;
Concede him then the colour charity
Casts on a doubtful course,—if blackish white
Or whitish black, will charity hesitate?
What did he else but act the precept out,
Leave, like a provident shepherd, his safe flock
To follow the single lamb and strayaway?
Best hope so and think so,—that the ticklish time
I' the carriage, the tempting privacy, the last
Somewhat ambiguous accident at the inn,
—All may bear explanation: may? then, must!
The letters,—do they so incriminate?
But what if the whole prove a prank o' the pen,
Flight of the fancy, none of theirs at all,
Bred of the vapours of my brain belike,
Or at worst mere exercise of scholar's-wit
In the courtly Caponsacchi: verse, convict?
Did not Catullus write less seemly once?
Yet *doctus* and unblemished he abides.
Wherefore so ready to infer the worst?
Still, I did righteously in bringing doubts
For the law to solve,—take the solution now!
"Seeing that the said associates, wife and priest,

"Bear themselves not without some touch of blame
"—Else why the pother, scandal and outcry
"Which trouble our peace and require chastisement?
"We, for complicity in Pompilia's flight
"And deviation, and carnal intercourse
"With the same, do set aside and relegate
"The Canon Caponsacchi for three years
"At Civita in the neighbourhood of Rome:
"And we consign Pompilia to the care
"Of a certain Sisterhood of penitents
"I' the city's self, expert to deal with such."
Word for word, there 's your judgment! Read it, lords,
Re-utter your deliberate penalty
For the crime yourselves establish! Your award—
Who chop a man's right-hand off at the wrist
For tracing with forefinger words in wine
O' the table of a drinking-booth that bear
Interpretation as they mocked the Church!
—Who brand a woman black between the breasts
For sinning by connection with a Jew:
While for the Jew's self—pudency be dumb!
You mete out punishment such and such, yet so
Punish the adultery of wife and priest!
Take note of that, before the Molinists do,
And read me right the riddle, since right must be!
While I stood rapt away with wonderment,

Voices broke in upon my mood and muse.
"Do you sleep?" began the friends at either ear,
"The case is settled,—you willed it should be so—
"None of our counsel, always recollect!
"With law's award, budge! Back into your place!
"Your betters shall arrange the rest for you.
"We 'll enter a new action, claim divorce:
"Your marriage was a cheat themselves allow:
"You erred i' the person,—might have married thus
"Your sister or your daughter unaware.
"We 'll gain you, that way, liberty at least,
"Sure of so much by law's own showing. Up
"And off with you and your unluckiness—
"Leave us to bury the blunder, sweep things smooth!"
I was in humble frame of mind, be sure!
I bowed, betook me to my place again.
Station by station I retraced the road,
Touched at this hostel, passed this post-house by,
Where, fresh-remembered yet, the fugitives
Had risen to the heroic stature: still—
"That was the bench they sat on,—there 's the board
"They took the meal at,—yonder garden-ground
"They leaned across the gate of,"—ever a word
O' the Helen and the Paris, with "Ha! you 're he,
"The . . . much-commiserated husband?" Step
By step, across the pelting, did I reach

Arezzo, underwent the archway's grin,
Traversed the length of sarcasm in the street,
Found myself in my horrible house once more,
And after a colloquy . . . no word assists!
With the mother and the brothers, stiffened me
Straight out from head to foot as dead man does,
And, thus prepared for life as he for hell,
Marched to the public Square and met the world.
Apologize for the pincers, palliate screws?
Ply me with such toy-trifles, I entreat!
Trust who has tried both sulphur and sops-in-wine!

I played the man as I best might, bade friends
Put non-essentials by and face the fact.
"What need to hang myself as you advise?
"The paramour is banished,—the ocean's width,
"Or the suburb's length,—to Ultima Thule, say,
"Or Proxima Civitas, what 's the odds of name
"And place? He 's banished, and the fact 's the thing.
"Why should law banish innocence an inch?
"Here 's guilt then, what else do I care to know?
"The adulteress lies imprisoned,—whether in a well
"With bricks above and a snake for company,
"Or tied by a garter to a bed-post,—much
"I mind what 's little,—least 's enough and to spare!
"The little fillip on the coward's cheek

"Serves as though crab-tree cudgel broke his pate.
"Law has pronounced there 's punishment, less or more:
"And I take note o' the fact and use it thus—
"For the first flaw in the original bond,
"I claim release. My contract was to wed
"The daughter of Pietro and Violante. Both
"Protest they never had a child at all.
"Then I have never made a contract: good!
"Cancel me quick the thing pretended one.
"I shall be free. What matter if hurried over
"The harbour-boom by a great favouring tide,
"Or the last of a spent ripple that lifts and leaves?
"The Abate is about it. Laugh who wins!
"You shall not laugh me out of faith in law!
"I listen, through all your noise, to Rome!"
Rome spoke.
In three months letters thence admonished me,
"Your plan for the divorce is all mistake.
"It would hold, now, had you, taking thought to wed
"Rachel of the blue eye and golden hair,
"Found swarth-skinned Leah cumber couch next day:
"But Rachel, blue-eyed golden-haired aright,
"Proving to be only Laban's child, not Lot's,
"Remains yours all the same for ever more.
"No whit to the purpose is your plea: you err
"I' the person and the quality—nowise

" In the individual,—that 's the case in point!
" You go to the ground,—are met by a cross-suit
" For separation, of the Rachel here,
" From bed and board,—she is the injured one,
" You did the wrong and have to answer it.
" As for the circumstance of imprisonment
" And colour it lends to this your new attack,
" Never fear, that point is considered too!
" The durance is already at an end;
" The convent-quiet preyed upon her health,
" She is transferred now to her parents' house
" —No-parents, when that cheats and plunders you,
" But parentage again confessed in full,
" When such confession pricks and plagues you more—
" As now—for, this their house is not the house
" In Via Vittoria wherein neighbours' watch
" Might incommode the freedom of your wife,
" But a certain villa smothered up in vines
" At the town's edge by the gate i' the Pauline Way,
" Out of eye-reach, out of ear-shot, little and lone,
" Whither a friend,—at Civita, we hope,
" A good half-dozen-hours' ride off,—might, some eve,
" Betake himself, and whence ride back, some morn,
" Nobody the wiser: but be that as it may,
" Do not afflict your brains with trifles now.
" You have still three suits to manage, all and each

" Ruinous truly should the event play false.
" It is indeed the likelier so to do,
" That brother Paul, your single prop and stay,
" After a vain attempt to bring the Pope
" To set aside procedures, sit himself
" And summarily use prerogative,
" Afford us the infallible finger's tact
" To disentwine your tangle of affairs,
" Paul,—finding it moreover past his strength
" To stem the irruption, bear Rome's ridicule
" Of . . . since friends must speak . . . to be round with you . . .
" Of the old outwitted husband, wronged and wroth,
" Pitted against a brace of juveniles—
" A brisk priest who is versed in Ovid's art
" More than his Summa, and a gamesome wife
" Able to act Corinna without book,
" Beside the waggish parents who played dupes
" To dupe the duper—(and truly divers scenes
" Of the Arezzo palace, tickle rib
" And tease eye till the tears come, so we laugh ;
" Nor wants the shock at the inn its comic force,
" And then the letters and poetry—*merum sal!*)
" —Paul, finally, in such a state of things,
" After a brief temptation to go jump
" And join the fishes in the Tiber, drowns

"Sorrow another and a wiser way:
"House and goods, he has sold all off, is gone,
"Leaves Rome,—whether for France or Spain, who knows?
"Or Britain almost divided from our orb.
"You have lost him anyhow."
Now,—I see my lords
Shift in their seat,—would I could do the same!
They probably please expect my bile was moved
To purpose, nor much blame me: now, they judge,
The fiery titillation urged my flesh
Break through the bonds. By your pardon, no, sweet Sirs!
I got such missives in the public place;
When I sought home,—with such news, mounted stair
And sat at last in the sombre gallery,
('T was Autumn, the old mother in bed betimes,
Having to bear that cold, the finer frame
Of her daughter-in-law had found intolerable—
The brother, walking misery away
O' the mountain-side with dog and gun belike)
As I supped, ate the coarse bread, drank the wine
Weak once, now acrid with the toad's-head-squeeze,
My wife's bestowment,—I broke silence thus:
"Let me, a man, manfully meet the fact,
"Confront the worst o' the truth, end, and have peace!

"I am irremediably beaten here,—
"The gross illiterate vulgar couple,—bah!
"Why, they have measured forces, mastered mine,
"Made me their spoil and prey from first to last.
"They have got my name,—'t is nailed now fast to theirs,
"The child or changeling is anyway my wife;
"Point by point as they plan they execute,
"They gain all, and I lose all—even to the lure
"That led to loss,—they have the wealth again
"They hazarded awhile to hook me with,
"Have caught the fish and find the bait entire:
"They even have their child or changeling back
"To trade with, turn to account a second time.
"The brother presumably might tell a tale
"Or give a warning,—he, too, flies the field,
"And with him vanish help and hope of help.
"They have caught me in the cavern where I fell,
"Covered my loudest cry for human aid
"With this enormous paving-stone of shame.
"Well, are we demigods or merely clay?
"Is success still attendant on desert?
"Is this, we live on, heaven and the final state,
"Or earth which means probation to the end?
"Why claim escape from man's predestined lot
"Of being beaten and baffled?—God's decree,
"In which I, bowing bruised head, acquiesce.

"One of us Franceschini fell long since
"I' the Holy Land, betrayed, tradition runs,
"To Paynims by the feigning of a girl
"He rushed to free from ravisher, and found
"Lay safe enough with friends in ambuscade
"Who flayed him while she clapped her hands and laughed:
"Let me end, falling by a like device.
"It will not be so hard. I am the last
"O' my line which will not suffer any more.
"I have attained to my full fifty years,
"(About the average of us all, 't is said,
"Though it seems longer to the unlucky man)
"—Lived through my share of life; let all end here,
"Me and the house and grief and shame at once.
"Friends my informants,—I can bear your blow!"
And I believe 't was in no unmeet match
For the stoic's mood, with something like a smile,
That, when morose December roused me next,
I took into my hand, broke seal to read
The new epistle from Rome. "All to no use!
"Whate'er the turn next injury take," smiled I,
"Here 's one has chosen his part and knows his cue.
"I am done with, dead now; strike away, good friends!
"Are the three suits decided in a trice?
"Against me,—there 's no question! How does it go?

"Is the parentage of my wife demonstrated
"Infamous to her wish? Parades she now
"Loosed of the cincture that so irked the loin?
"Is the last penny extracted from my purse
"To mulct me for demanding the first pound
"Was promised in return for value paid?
"Has the priest, with nobody to court beside,
"Courted the Muse in exile, hitched my hap
"Into a rattling ballad-rhyme which, bawled
"At tavern-doors, wakes rapture everywhere,
"And helps cheap wine down throat this Christmas time,
"Beating the bagpipes? Any or all of these!
"As well, good friends, you cursed my palace here
"To its old cold stone face,—stuck your cap for crest
"Over the shield that 's extant in the Square,—
"Or spat on the statue's cheek, the impatient world
"Sees cumber tomb-top in our family church:
"Let him creep under covert as I shall do,
"Half below-ground already indeed. Good-bye!
"My brothers are priests, and childless so; that 's well—
"And, thank God most for this, no child leave I—
"None after me to bear till his heart break
"The being a Franceschini and my son!"

"Nay," said the letter, "but you have just that!
"A babe, your veritable son and heir—

"Lawful,—'t is only eight months since your wife
"Left you,—so, son and heir, your babe was born
"Last Wednesday in the villa,—you see the cause
"For quitting Convent without beat of drum,
"Stealing a hurried march to this retreat
"That 's not so savage as the Sisterhood
"To slips and stumbles: Pietro's heart is soft,
"Violante leans to pity's side,—the pair
"Ushered you into life a bouncing boy:
"And he 's already hidden away and safe
"From any claim on him you mean to make—
"They need him for themselves,—don't fear, they know
"The use o' the bantling,—the nerve thus laid bare
"To nip at, new and nice, with finger-nail!"

Then I rose up like fire, and fire-like roared.
What, all is only beginning not ending now?
The worm which wormed its way from skin through flesh
To the bone and there lay biting, did its best,—
What, it goes on to scrape at the bone's self,
Will wind to inmost marrow and madden me?
There 's to be yet my representative,
Another of the name shall keep displayed
The flag with the ordure on it, brandish still
The broken sword has served to stir a jakes?
Who will he be, how will you call the man?

A Franceschini,—when who cut my purse,
Filched my name, hemmed me round, hustled me hard
As rogues at a fair some fool they strip i' the midst,
When these count gains, vaunt pillage presently:—
But a Caponsacchi, oh, be very sure!
When what demands its tribute of applause
Is the cunning and impudence o' the pair of cheats,
The lies and lust o' the mother, and the brave
Bold carriage of the priest, worthily crowned
By a witness to his feat i' the following age,—
And how this three-fold cord could hook and fetch
And land leviathan that king of pride!
Or say, by some mad miracle of chance,
Is he indeed my flesh and blood, this babe?
Was it because fate forged a link at last
Betwixt my wife and me, and both alike
Found we had henceforth some one thing to love,
Was it when she could damn my soul indeed
She unlatched door, let all the devils o' the dark
Dance in on me to cover her escape?
Why then, the surplusage of disgrace, the spilth
Over and above the measure of infamy,
Failing to take effect on my coarse flesh
Seasoned with scorn now, saturate with shame,—
Is saved to instil on and corrode the brow,
The baby-softness of my first-born child—

The child I had died to see though in a dream,
The child I was bid strike out for, beat the wave
And baffle the tide of troubles where I swam,
So I might touch shore, lay down life at last
At the feet so dim and distant and divine
Of the apparition, as 't were Mary's Babe
Had held, through night and storm, the torch aloft,—
Born now in very deed to bear this brand
On forehead and curse me who could not save!
Rather be the town talk true, square's jest, street's jeer
True, my own inmost heart's confession true,
And he the priest's bastard and none of mine!
Ay, there was cause for flight, swift flight and sure!
The husband gets unruly, breaks all bounds
When he encounters some familiar face,
Fashion of feature, brow and eyes and lips
Where he least looked to find them,—time to fly!
This bastard then, a nest for him is made,
As the manner is of vermin, in my flesh:
Shall I let the filthy pest buzz, flap and sting,
Busy at my vitals and, nor hand nor foot
Lift, but let be, lie still and rot resigned?
No, I appeal to God,—what says Himself,
How lessons Nature when I look to learn?
Why, that I am alive, am still a man
With brain and heart and tongue and right-hand too—

Nay, even with friends, in such a cause as this,
To right me if I fail to take my right.
No more of law; a voice beyond the law
Enters my heart, *Quis est pro Domino?*

Myself, in my own Vittiano, told the tale
To my own serving-people summoned there:
Told the first half of it, scarce heard to end
By judges who got done with judgment quick
And clamoured to go execute her 'hest—
Who cried "Not one of us that dig your soil
"And dress your vineyard, prune your olive-trees,
"But would have brained the man debauched our wife,
"And staked the wife whose lust allured the man,
"And paunched the Duke, had it been possible,
"Who ruled the land yet barred us such revenge!"
I fixed on the first whose eyes caught mine, some four
Resolute youngsters with the heart still fresh,
Filled my purse with the residue o' the coin
Uncaught-up by my wife whom haste made blind,
Donned the first rough and rural garb I found,
Took whatsoever weapon came to hand,
And out we flung and on we ran or reeled
Romeward. I have no memory of our way,
Only that, when at intervals the cloud

Of horror about me opened to let in life,
I listened to some song in the ear, some snatch
Of a legend, relic of religion, stray
Fragment of record very strong and old
Of the first conscience, the anterior right,
The God's-gift to mankind, impulse to quench
The antagonistic spark of hell and tread
Satan and all his malice into dust,
Declare to the world the one law, right is right.
Then the cloud re-encompassed me, and so
I found myself, as on the wings of winds,
Arrived : I was at Rome on Christmas Eve.

Festive bells – everywhere the Feast o' the Babe,
Joy upon earth, peace and good will to man !
I am baptized. I started and let drop
The dagger. "Where is it, His promised peace?"
Nine days o' the Birth-Feast did I pause and pray
To enter into no temptation more.
I bore the hateful house, my brother's once,
Deserted,—let the ghost of social joy
Mock and make mouths at me from empty room
And idle door that missed the master's step,—
Bore the frank wonder of incredulous eyes,
As my own people watched without a word,
Waited, from where they huddled round the hearth

Black like all else, that nod so slow to come.
I stopped my ears even to the inner call
Of the dread duty, only heard the song
" Peace upon earth," saw nothing but the face
O' the Holy Infant and the halo there
Able to cover yet another face
Behind it, Satan's which I else should see.
But, day by day, joy waned and withered off:
The Babe's face, premature with peak and pine,
Sank into wrinkled ruinous old age,
Suffering and death, then mist-like disappeared,
And showed only the Cross at end of all,
Left nothing more to interpose 'twixt me
And the dread duty: for the angels' song,
" Peace upon earth," louder and louder pealed
" O Lord, how long, how long be unavenged?"
On the ninth day, this grew too much for man.
I started up—" Some end must be!" At once,
Silence: then, scratching like a death-watch-tick,
Slowly within my brain was syllabled,
" One more concession, one decisive way
" And but one, to determine thee the truth,—
" This way, in fine, I whisper in thy ear:
" Now doubt, anon decide, thereupon act!"

" That is a way, thou whisperest in my ear!

"I doubt, I will decide, then act," said I—
Then beckoned my companions: "Time is come!"

And so, all yet uncertain save the will
To do right, and the daring aught save leave
Right undone, I did find myself at last
I' the dark before the villa with my friends,
And made the experiment, the final test,
Ultimate chance that ever was to be
For the wretchedness inside. I knocked, pronounced
The name, the predetermined touch for truth,
"What welcome for the wanderer? Open straight—"
To the friend, physician, friar upon his rounds,
Traveller belated, beggar lame and blind?
No, but—"to Caponsacchi!" And the door
Opened.
And then,—why, even then, I think,
I' the minute that confirmed my worst of fears,
Surely,—I pray God that I think aright!—
Had but Pompilia's self, the tender thing
Who once was good and pure, was once my lamb
And lay in my bosom, had the well-known shape
Fronted me in the door-way,—stood there faint
With the recent pang perhaps of giving birth
To what might, though by miracle, seem my child,—
Nay more, I will say, had even the aged fool

Pietro, the dotard, in whom folly and age
Wrought, more than enmity or malevolence,
To practise and conspire against my peace,—
Had either of these but opened, I had paused.
But it was she the hag, she that brought hell
For a dowry with her to her husband's house,
She the mock-mother, she that made the match
And married me to perdition, spring and source
O' the fire inside me that boiled up from heart
To brain and hailed the Fury gave it birth,—
Violante Comparini, she it was,
With the old grin amid the wrinkles yet,
Opened: as if in turning from the Cross,
With trust to keep the sight and save my soul,
I had stumbled, first thing, on the serpent's head
Coiled with a leer at foot of it.
There was the end!
Then was I rapt away by the impulse, one
Immeasurable everlasting wave of a need
To abolish that detested life. 'T was done:
You know the rest and how the folds o' the thing,
Twisting for help, involved the other two
More or less serpent-like: how I was mad,
Blind, stamped on all, the earth-worms with the asp,
And ended so.
You came on me that night,

Your officers of justice,—caught the crime
In the first natural frenzy of remorse?
Twenty miles off, sound sleeping as a child
On a cloak i' the straw which promised shelter first,
With the bloody arms beside me,—was it not so? 1675
Wherefore not? Why, how else should I be found?
I was my own self, had my sense again,
My soul safe from the serpents. I could sleep:
Indeed and, dear my lords, I shall sleep now,
Spite of my shoulder, in five minutes' space, 1680
When you dismiss me, having truth enough!
It is but a few days are passed, I find,
Since this adventure. Do you tell me, four?
Then the dead are scarce quiet where they lie,
Old Pietro, old Violante, side by side 1685
At the church Lorenzo,—oh, they know it well!
So do I. But my wife is still alive,
Has breath enough to tell her story yet,
Her way, which is not mine, no doubt at all.
And Caponsacchi, you have summoned him,— 1690
Was he so far to send for? Not at hand?
I thought some few o' the stabs were in his heart,
Or had not been so lavish: less had served.
Well, he too tells his story,—florid prose
As smooth as mine is rough. You see, my lords, 1695
There will be a lying intoxicating smoke

Born of the blood,—confusion probably,—
For lies breed lies—but all that rests with you!
The trial is no concern of mine; with me
The main of the care is over: I at least
Recognize who took that huge burthen off,
Let me begin to live again. I did
God's bidding and man's duty, so, breathe free;
Look you to the rest! I heard Himself prescribe,
That great Physician, and dared lance the core
Of the bad ulcer; and the rage abates,
I am myself and whole now: I prove cured
By the eyes that see, the ears that hear again,
The limbs that have relearned their youthful play,
The healthy taste of food and feel of clothes
And taking to our common life once more,
All that now urges my defence from death.
The willingness to live, what means it else?
Before,—but let the very action speak!
Judge for yourselves, what life seemed worth to me
Who, not by proxy but in person, pitched
Head-foremost into danger as a fool
That never cares if he can swim or no—
So he but find the bottom, braves the brook.
No man omits precaution, quite neglects
Secresy, safety, schemes not how retreat,
Having schemed he might advance. Did I so scheme?

Why, with a warrant which 't is ask and have,
With horse thereby made mine without a word,
I had gained the frontier and slept safe that night.
Then, my companions,—call them what you please,
Slave or stipendiary,—what need of one
To me whose right-hand did its owner's work?
Hire an assassin yet expose yourself?
As well buy glove and then thrust naked hand
I' the thorn-bush. No, the wise man stays at home,
Sends only agents out, with pay to earn:
At home, when they come back,—he straight discards
Or else disowns. Why use such tools at all
When a man's foes are of his house, like mine,
Sit at his board, sleep in his bed? Why noise,
When there 's the *acquetta* and the silent way?
Clearly my life was valueless.

But now
Health is returned, and sanity of soul
Nowise indifferent to the body's harm.
I find the instinct bids me save my life;
My wits, too, rally round me; I pick up
And use the arms that strewed the ground before,
Unnoticed or spurned aside: I take my stand,
Make my defence. God shall not lose a life
May do Him further service, while I speak

And you hear, you my judges and last hope!
You are the law: 't is to the law I look.
I began life by hanging to the law,
To the law it is I hang till life shall end.
My brother made appeal to the Pope, 't is true,
To stay proceedings, judge my cause himself
Nor trouble law,—some fondness of conceit
That rectitude, sagacity sufficed
The investigator in a case like mine,
Dispensed with the machine of law. The Pope
Knew better, set aside my brother's plea
And put me back to law,—referred the cause
Ad judices meos,—doubtlessly did well.
Here, then, I clutch my judges,—I claim law—
Cry, by the higher law whereof your law
O' the land is humbly representative,—
Cry, on what point is it, where either accuse,
I fail to furnish you defence? I stand
Acquitted, actually or virtually,
By every intermediate kind of court
That takes account of right or wrong in man,
Each unit in the series that begins
With God's throne, ends with the tribunal here.
God breathes, not speaks, his verdicts, felt not heard,
Passed on successively to each court I call
Man's conscience, custom, manners, all that make

More and more effort to promulgate, mark
God's verdict in determinable words,
Till last come human jurists—solidify
Fluid result,—what 's fixable lies forged,
Statute,—the residue escapes in fume,
Yet hangs aloft, a cloud, as palpable
To the finer sense as word the legist welds.
Justinian's Pandects only make precise
What simply sparkled in men's eyes before,
Twitched in their brow or quivered on their lip,
Waited the speech they called but would not come.
These courts then, whose decree your own confirms,—
Take my whole life, not this last act alone,
Look on it by the light reflected thence!
What has Society to charge me with?
Come, unreservedly,—favour none nor fear,—
I am Guido Franceschini, am I not?
You know the courses I was free to take?
I took just that which let me serve the Church,
I gave it all my labour in body and soul
Till these broke down i' the service. "Specify?"
Well, my last patron was a Cardinal.
I left him unconvicted of a fault—
Was even helped, by way of gratitude,
Into the new life that I left him for,
This very misery of the marriage,—he

Made it, kind soul, so far as in him lay—
Signed the deed where you yet may see his name.
He is gone to his reward,—dead, being my friend
Who could have helped here also,—that, of course!
So far, there 's my acquittal, I suppose.
Then comes the marriage itself—no question, lords.
Of the entire validity of that!
In the extremity of distress, 't is true,
For after-reasons, furnished abundantly,
I wished the thing invalid, went to you
Only some months since, set you duly forth
My wrong and prayed your remedy, that a cheat
Should not have force to cheat my whole life long.
"Annul a marriage? 'T is impossible!
"Though ring about your neck be brass not gold,
"Needs must it clasp, gangrene you all the same!"
Well, let me have the benefit, just so far,
O' the fact announced,—my wife then is my wife,
I have allowance for a husband's right.
I am charged with passing right's due bound,—such acts
As I thought just, my wife called cruelty,
Complained of in due form,—convoked no court
Of common gossipry, but took her wrongs—
And not once, but so long as patience served—
To the town's top, jurisdiction's pride of place,
To the Archbishop and the Governor.

These heard her charge with my reply, and found
That futile, this sufficient: they dismissed
The hysteric querulous rebel, and confirmed
Authority in its wholesome exercise,
They, with directest access to the facts.
" —Ay, for it was their friendship favoured you,
" Hereditary alliance against a breach
" I' the social order: prejudice for the name
" Of Franceschini!"—So I hear it said:
But not here. You, lords, never will you say
" Such is the nullity of grace and truth,
" Such the corruption of the faith, such lapse
" Of law, such warrant have the Molinists
" For daring reprehend us as they do,—
" That we pronounce it just a common case,
" Two dignitaries, each in his degree
" First, foremost, this the spiritual head, and that
" The secular arm o' the body politic,
" Should, for mere wrongs' love and injustice' sake,
" Side with, aid and abet in cruelty
" This broken beggarly noble,—bribed perhaps
" By his watered wine and mouldy crust of bread—
" Rather than that sweet tremulous flower-like wife
" Who kissed their hands and curled about their feet
" Looking the irresistible loveliness
" In tears that takes man captive, turns" . . . enough!

Do you blast your predecessors? What forbids
Posterity to trebly blast yourselves
Who set the example and instruct their tongue?
You dreaded the crowd, succumbed to the popular cry,
Or else, would nowise seem defer thereto
And yield to public clamour though i' the right!
You ridded your eye of my unseemliness,
The noble whose misfortune wearied you,—
Or, what 's more probable, made common cause
With the cleric section, punished in myself
Maladroit uncomplaisant laity,
Defective in behaviour to a priest
Who claimed the customary partnership
I' the house and the wife. Lords, any lie will serve!
Look to it,—or allow me freed so far!

Then I proceed a step, come with clean hands
Thus far, re-tell the tale told eight months since.
The wife, you allow so far, I have not wronged,
Has fled my roof, plundered me and decamped
In company with the priest her paramour:
And I gave chase, came up with, caught the two
At the wayside inn where both had spent the night,
Found them in flagrant fault, and found as well,
By documents with name and plan and date,
The fault was furtive then that 's flagrant now,

Their intercourse a long established crime.
I did not take the license law's self gives
To slay both criminals o' the spot at the time,
But held my hand,—preferred play prodigy
Of patience which the world calls cowardice,
Rather than seem anticipate the law
And cast discredit on its organs,—you.
So, to your bar I brought both criminals,
And made my statement: heard their counter-charge,
Nay,—their corroboration of my tale,
Nowise disputing its allegements, not
I' the main, not more than nature's decency
Compels men to keep silence in this kind,—
Only contending that the deeds avowed
Would take another colour and bear excuse.
You were to judge between us; so you did.
You disregard the excuse, you breathe away
The colour of innocence and leave guilt black,
"Guilty" is the decision of the court,
And that I stand in consequence untouched,
One white integrity from head to heel.
Not guilty? Why then did you punish them?
True, punishment has been inadequate—
'T is not I only, not my friends that joke,
My foes that jeer, who echo "inadequate"—
For, by a chance that comes to help for once,

The same case simultaneously was judged
At Arezzo, in the province of the Court
Where the crime had its beginning but not end.
They then, deciding on but half o' the crime,
The effraction, robbery,—features of the fault
I never cared to dwell upon at Rome,—
What was it they adjudged as penalty
To Pompilia,—the one criminal o' the pair
Amenable to their judgment, not the priest
Who is Rome's? Why, just imprisonment for life
I' the Stinche. There was Tuscany's award
To a wife that robs her husband: you at Rome—
Having to deal with adultery in a wife
And, in a priest, breach of the priestly vow—
Give gentle sequestration for a month
In a manageable Convent, then release,
You call imprisonment, in the very house
O' the very couple, which the aim and end
Of the culprits' crime was—just to reach and rest
And there take solace and defy me: well,—
This difference 'twixt their penalty and yours
Is immaterial: make your penalty less—
Merely that she should henceforth wear black gloves
And white fan, she who wore the opposite—
Why, all the same the fact o' the thing subsists.
Reconcile to your conscience as you may,

Be it on your own heads, you pronounced but half
O' the penalty for heinousness like hers
And his, that pays a fault at Carnival
Of comfit-pelting past discretion's law,
Or accident to handkerchief in Lent
Which falls perversely as a lady kneels
Abruptly, and but half conceals her neck!
I acquiesce for my part: punished, though
By a pin-point scratch, means guilty: guilty means
—What have I been but innocent hitherto?
Anyhow, here the offence, being punished, ends.

Ends?—for you deemed so, did you not, sweet lords?
That was throughout the veritable aim
O' the sentence light or heavy,—to redress
Recognized wrong? You righted me, I think?
Well then,—what if I, at this last of all,
Demonstrate you, as my whole pleading proves,
No particle of wrong received thereby
One atom of right?—that cure grew worse disease?
That in the process you call "justice done"
All along you have nipped away just inch
By inch the creeping climbing length of plague
Breaking my tree of life from root to branch,
And left me, after all and every act
Of your interference,—lightened of what load?

At liberty wherein? Mere words and wind!
"Now I was saved, now I should feel no more
"The hot breath, find a respite from fixed eye
"And vibrant tongue!" Why, scarce your back was turned,
There was the reptile, that feigned death at first,
Renewing its detested spire and spire
Around me, rising to such heights of hate
That, so far from mere purpose now to crush
And coil itself on the remains of me,
Body and mind, and there flesh fang content,
Its aim is now to evoke life from death,
Make me anew, satisfy in my son
The hunger I may feed but never sate,
Tormented on to perpetuity,—
My son, whom, dead, I shall know, understand,
Feel, hear, see, never more escape the sight
In heaven that 's turned to hell, or hell returned
(So rather say) to this same earth again,—
Moulded into the image and made one,
Fashioned of soul as featured like in face,
First taught to laugh and lisp and stand and go
By that thief, poisoner and adulteress
I call Pompilia, he calls . . . sacred name,
Be unpronounced, be unpolluted here!
And last led up to the glory and prize of hate

By his . . . foster-father, Caponsacchi's self,
The perjured priest, pink of conspirators,
Tricksters and knaves, yet polished, superfine,
Manhood to model adolescence by!
Lords, look on me, declare,—when, what I show,
Is nothing more nor less than what you deemed
And doled me out for justice,—what did you say?
For reparation, restitution and more,—
Will you not thank, praise, bid me to your breasts
For having done the thing you thought to do,
And thoroughly trampled out sin's life at last?
I have heightened phrase to make your soft speech serve,
Doubled the blow you but essayed to strike,
Carried into effect your mandate here
That else had fallen to ground: mere duty done,
Oversight of the master just supplied
By zeal i' the servant. I, being used to serve,
Have simply . . . what is it they charge me with?
Blackened again, made legible once more
Your own decree, not permanently writ,
Rightly conceived but all too faintly traced.
It reads efficient, now, comminatory,
A terror to the wicked, answers so
The mood o' the magistrate, the mind of law.
Absolve, then, me, law's mere executant!
Protect your own defender,—save me, Sirs!

Give me my life, give me my liberty,
My good name and my civic rights again!
It would be too fond, too complacent play
Into the hands o' the devil, should we lose
The game here, I for God: a soldier-bee
That yields his life, exenterate with the stroke
O' the sting that saves the hive. I need that life.
Oh, never fear! I 'll find life plenty use
Though it should last five years more, aches and all!
For, first thing, there 's the mother's age to help—
Let her come break her heart upon my breast,
Not on the blank stone of my nameless tomb!
The fugitive brother has to be bidden back
To the old routine, repugnant to the tread,
Of daily suit and service to the Church,—
Thro' gibe and jest, those stones that Shimei flung!
Ay, and the spirit-broken youth at home,
The awe-struck altar-ministrant, shall make
Amends for faith now palsied at the source,
Shall see truth yet triumphant, justice yet
A victor in the battle of this world!
Give me—for last, best gift—my son again,
Whom law makes mine,—I take him at your word,
Mine be he, by miraculous mercy, lords!
Let me lift up his youth and innocence
To purify my palace, room by room

Purged of the memories, lend from his bright brow
Light to the old proud paladin my sire
Shrunk now for shame into the darkest shade
O' the tapestry, showed him once and shrouds him now!
Then may we,—strong from that rekindled smile,—
Go forward, face new times, the better day.
And when, in times made better through your brave
Decision now,—might but Utopia be!—
Rome rife with honest women and strong men,
Manners reformed, old habits back once more,
Customs that recognize the standard worth,—
The wholesome household rule in force again,
Husbands once more God's representative,
Wives like the typical Spouse once more, and Priests
No longer men of Belial, with no aim
At leading silly women captive, but
Of rising to such duties as yours now,—
Then will I set my son at my right-hand
And tell his father's story to this point,
Adding "The task seemed superhuman, still
"I dared and did it, trusting God and law:
"And they approved of me: give praise to both!"
And if, for answer, he shall stoop to kiss
My hand, and peradventure start thereat,—

I engage to smile "That was an accident
"I' the necessary process,—just a trip
"O' the torture-irons in their search for truth,—
"Hardly misfortune, and no fault at all."

VI.

GIUSEPPE CAPONSACCHI.

ANSWER you, Sirs? Do I understand aright?
Have patience! In this sudden smoke from hell,—
So things disguise themselves,—I cannot see
My own hand held thus broad before my face
And know it again. Answer you? Then that means
Tell over twice what I, the first time, told
Six months ago: 't was here, I do believe,
Fronting you same three in this very room,
I stood and told you: yet now no one laughs,
Who then . . . nay, dear my lords, but laugh you did,
As good as laugh, what in a judge we style
Laughter—no levity, nothing indecorous, lords!
Only,—I think I apprehend the mood:
There was the blameless shrug, permissible smirk,
The pen's pretence at play with the pursed mouth,
The titter stifled in the hollow palm
Which rubbed the eyebrow and caressed the nose,

When I first told my tale: they meant, you know,
"The sly one, all this we are bound believe!
"Well, he can say no other than what he says.
"We have been young, too,—come, there 's greater guilt!
"Let him but decently disembroil himself,
"Scramble from out the scrape nor move the mud,—
"We solid ones may risk a finger-stretch!
And now you sit as grave, stare as aghast
As if I were a phantom: now 't is—"Friend,
"Collect yourself!"—no laughing matter more—
"Counsel the Court in this extremity,
"Tell us again!"—tell that, for telling which,
I got the jocular piece of punishment,
Was sent to lounge a little in the place
Whence now of a sudden here you summon me
To take the intelligence from just—your lips!
You, Judge Tommati, who then tittered most,—
That she I helped eight months since to escape
Her husband, was retaken by the same,
Three days ago, if I have seized your sense,—
(I being disallowed to interfere,
Meddle or make in a matter none of mine,
For you and law were guardians quite enough
O' the innocent, without a pert priest's help)—
And that he has butchered her accordingly,
As she foretold and as myself believed,—

And, so foretelling and believing so,
We were punished, both of us, the merry way:
Therefore, tell once again the tale! For what?
Pompilia is only dying while I speak!
Why does the mirth hang fire and miss the smile?
My masters, there 's an old book, you should con
For strange adventures, applicable yet,
'T is stuffed with. Do you know that there was once
This thing: a multitude of worthy folk
Took recreation, watched a certain group
Of soldiery intent upon a game,—
How first they wrangled, but soon fell to play,
Threw dice,—the best diversion in the world.
A word in your ear,—they are now casting lots,
Ay, with that gesture quaint and cry uncouth,
For the coat of One murdered an hour ago!
I am a priest,—talk of what I have learned.
Pompilia is bleeding out her life belike,
Gasping away the latest breath of all,
This minute, while I talk—not while you laugh?

Yet, being sobered now, what is it you ask
By way of explanation? There 's the fact!
It seems to fill the universe with sight
And sound,—from the four corners of this earth
Tells itself over, to my sense at least.

But you may want it lower set i' the scale,—
Too vast, too close it clangs in the ear, perhaps;
You 'd stand back just to comprehend it more.
Well then, let me, the hollow rock, condense
The voice o' the sea and wind, interpret you
The mystery of this murder. God above!
It is too paltry, such a transference
O' the storm's roar to the cranny of the stone!

This deed, you saw begin—why does its end
Surprise you? Why should the event enforce
The lesson, we ourselves learned, she and I,
From the first o' the fact, and taught you, all in vain?
This Guido from whose throat you took my grasp,
Was this man to be favoured, now, or feared,
Let do his will, or have his will restrained,
In the relation with Pompilia? Say!
Did any other man need interpose
—Oh, though first comer, though as strange at the work
As fribble must be, coxcomb, fool that 's near
To knave as, say, a priest who fears the world—
Was he bound brave the peril, save the doomed,
Or go on, sing his snatch and pluck his flower,
Keep the straight path and let the victim die?
I held so; you decided otherwise,
Saw no such peril, therefore no such need

To stop song, loosen flower, and leave path. Law,
Law was aware and watching, would suffice,
Wanted no priest's intrusion, palpably
Pretence, too manifest a subterfuge!
Whereupon I, priest, coxcomb, fribble and fool,
Ensconced me in my corner, thus rebuked,
A kind of culprit, over-zealous hound
Kicked for his pains to kennel; I gave place
To you, and let the law reign paramount:
I left Pompilia to your watch and ward,
And now you point me—there and thus she lies!

Men, for the last time, what do you want with me?
Is it,—you acknowledge, as it were, a use,
A profit in employing me?—at length
I may conceivably help the august law?
I am free to break the blow, next hawk that swoops
On next dove, nor miss much of good repute?
Or what if this your summons, after all,
Be but the form of mere release, no more,
Which turns the key and lets the captive go?
I have paid enough in person at Civita,
Am free,—what more need I concern me with?
Thank you! I am rehabilitated then,
A very reputable priest. But she—
The glory of life, the beauty of the world,

The splendour of heaven, . . . well, Sirs, does no one
move?
Do I speak ambiguously? The glory, I say,
And the beauty, I say, and splendour, still say I,
Who, priest and trained to live my whole life long
On beauty and splendour, solely at their source,
God,—have thus recognized my food in her,
You tell me, that 's fast dying while we talk,
Pompilia! How does lenity to me,
Remit one death-bed pang to her? Come smile!
The proper wink at the hot-headed youth
Who lets his soul show, through transparent words,
The mundane love that 's sin and scandal too!
You are all struck acquiescent now, it seems:
It seems the oldest, gravest signor here,
Even the redoubtable Tommati, sits
Chop-fallen,—understands how law might take
Service like mine, of brain and heart and hand,
In good part. Better late than never, law
You understand of a sudden, gospel too
Has a claim here, may possibly pronounce
Consistent with my priesthood, worthy Christ,
That I endeavoured to save Pompilia?

Then,
You were wrong, you see: that 's well to see, though late:

That 's all we may expect of man, this side
The grave : his good is—knowing he is bad :
Thus will it be with us when the books ope
And we stand at the bar on judgment-day.
Well then, I have a mind to speak, see cause
To relume the quenched flax by this dreadful light,
Burn my soul out in showing you the truth.
I heard, last time I stood here to be judged,
What is priest's-duty,—labour to pluck tares
And weed the corn of Molinism ; let me
Make you hear, this time, how, in such a case,
Man, be he in the priesthood or at plough,
Mindful of Christ or marching step by step
With . . . what 's his style, the other potentate
Who bids have courage and keep honour safe,
Nor let minuter admonition tease ?—
How he is bound, better or worse, to act.
Earth will not end through this misjudgment, no !
For you and the others like you sure to come,
Fresh work is sure to follow,—wickedness
That wants withstanding. Many a man of blood,
Many a man of guile will clamour yet,
Bid you redress his grievance,—as he clutched
The prey, forsooth a stranger stepped between,
And there 's the good gripe in pure waste ! My part
Is done ; i' the doing it, I pass away

Out of the world. I want no more with earth.
Let me, in heaven's name, use the very snuff
O' the taper in one last spark shall show truth
For a moment, show Pompilia who was true!
Not for her sake, but yours: if she is dead,
Oh, Sirs, she can be loved by none of you
Most or least priestly! Saints, to do us good,
Must be in heaven, I seem to understand:
We never find them saints before, at least.
Be her first prayer then presently for you—
She has done the good to me . . .
What is all this?
There, I was born, have lived, shall die, a fool!
This is a foolish outset:—might with cause
Give colour to the very lie o' the man,
The murderer,—make as if I loved his wife,
In the way he called love. He is the fool there!
Why, had there been in me the touch of taint,
I had picked up so much of knaves'-policy
As hide it, keep one hand pressed on the place
Suspected of a spot would damn us both.
Or no, not her!—not even if any of you
Dares think that I, i' the face of death, her death
That 's in my eyes and ears and brain and heart,
Lie,—if he does, let him! I mean to say,
So he stop there, stay thought from smirching her

The snow-white soul that angels fear to take
Untenderly. But, all the same, I know
I too am taintless, and I bare my breast.
You can't think, men as you are, all of you,
But that, to hear thus suddenly such an end
Of such a wonderful white soul, that comes
Of a man and murderer calling the white black,
Must shake me, trouble and disadvantage. Sirs,
Only seventeen!

Why, good and wise you are!
You might at the beginning stop my mouth:
So, none would be to speak for her, that knew.
I talk impertinently, and you bear,
All the same. This it is to have to do
With honest hearts: they easily may err,
But in the main they wish well to the truth.
You are Christians; somehow, no one ever plucked
A rag, even, from the body of the Lord,
To wear and mock with, but, despite himself,
He looked the greater and was the better. Yes,
I shall go on now. Does she need or not
I keep calm? Calm I 'll keep as monk that croons
Transcribing battle, earthquake, famine, plague,
From parchment to his cloister's chronicle.
Not one word more from the point now!

I begin.
Yes, I am one of your body and a priest.
Also I am a younger son o' the House
Oldest now, greatest once, in my birth-town
Arezzo, I recognize no equal there—
(I want all arguments, all sorts of arms
That seem to serve,—use this for a reason, wait !)
Not therefore thrust into the Church, because
O' the piece of bread one gets there. We were first
Of Fiesole, that rings still with the fame
Of Capo-in-Sacco our progenitor:
When Florence ruined Fiesole, our folk
Migrated to the victor-city, and there
Flourished,—our palace and our tower attest,
In the Old Mercato,—this was years ago,
Four hundred, full,—no, it wants fourteen just.
Our arms are those of Fiesole itself,
The shield quartered with white and red: a branch
Are the Salviati of us, nothing more.
That were good help to the Church? But better still—
Not simply for the advantage of my birth
I' the way of the world, was I proposed for priest;
But because there 's an illustration, late
I' the day, that 's loved and looked to as a saint
Still in Arezzo, he was bishop of,
Sixty years since: he spent to the last doit

His bishop's-revenue among the poor,
And used to tend the needy and the sick,
Barefoot, because of his humility.
He it was,—when the Granduke Ferdinand
Swore he would raze our city, plough the place
And sow it with salt, because we Aretines
Had tied a rope about the neck, to hale
The statue of his father from its base
For hate's sake,—he availed by prayers and tears
To pacify the Duke and save the town.
This was my father's father's brother. You see,
For his sake, how it was I had a right
To the self-same office, bishop in the egg,
So, grew i' the garb and prattled in the school,
Was made expect, from infancy almost,
The proper mood o' the priest; till time ran by
And brought the day when I must read the vows,
Declare the world renounced and undertake
To become priest and leave probation,—leap
Over the ledge into the other life,
Having gone trippingly hitherto up to the height
O'er the wan water. Just a vow to read!

I stopped short awe-struck. "How shall holiest flesh
"Engage to keep such vow inviolate,
"How much less mine? I know myself too weak,

"Unworthy! Choose a worthier stronger man!"
And the very Bishop smiled and stopped my mouth
In its mid-protestation. "Incapable?
"Qualmish of conscience? Thou ingenuous boy!
"Clear up the clouds and cast thy scruples far!
"I satisfy thee there 's an easier sense
"Wherein to take such vow than suits the first
"Rough rigid reading. Mark what makes all smooth,
"Nay, has been even a solace to myself!
"The Jews who needs must, in their synagogue,
"Utter sometimes the holy name of God,
"A thing their superstition boggles at,
"Pronounce aloud the ineffable sacrosanct,—
"How does their shrewdness help them? In this wise;
"Another set of sounds they substitute,
"Jumble so consonants and vowels—how
"Should I know?—that there grows from out the old
"Quite a new word that means the very same—
"And o'er the hard place slide they with a smile.
"Giuseppe Maria Caponsacchi mine,
"Nobody wants you in these latter days
"To prop the Church by breaking your back-bone,—
"As the necessary way was once, we know,
"When Diocletian flourished and his like.
"That building of the buttress-work was done
"By martyrs and confessors: let it bide,

"Add not a brick, but, where you see a chink,
"Stick in a sprig of ivy or root a rose
"Shall make amends and beautify the pile!
"We profit as you were the painfullest
"O' the martyrs, and you prove yourself a match
"For the cruelest confessor ever was,
"If you march boldly up and take your stand
"Where their blood soaks, their bones yet strew the soil,
"And cry 'Take notice, I the young and free
"'And well-to-do i' the world, thus leave the world,
"'Cast in my lot thus with no gay young world
"'But the grand old Church: she tempts me of the two!'
"Renounce the world? Nay, keep and give it us!
"Let us have you, and boast of what you bring.
"We want the pick o' the earth to practise with,
"Not its offscouring, halt and deaf and blind
"In soul and body. There 's a rubble-stone
"Unfit for the front o' the building, stuff to stow
"In a gap behind and keep us weather-tight;
"There 's porphyry for the prominent place. Good lack!
"Saint Paul has had enough and to spare, I trow,
"Of ragged run-away Onesimus:
"He wants the right-hand with the signet-ring
"Of King Agrippa, now, to shake and use.
"I have a heavy scholar cloistered up,
"Close under lock and key, kept at his task

"Of letting Fénelon know the fool he is,
"In a book I promise Christendom next Spring.
"Why, if he covets so much meat, the clown,
"As a lark's wing next Friday, or, any day,
"Diversion beyond catching his own fleas,
"He shall be properly swinged, I promise him.
"But you, who are so quite another paste
"Of a man,—do you obey me? Cultivate
"Assiduous that superior gift you have
"Of making madrigals—(who told me? Ah!)
"Get done a Marinesque Adoniad straight
"With a pulse o' the blood a-pricking, here and there,
"That I may tell the lady 'And he 's ours!'"

So I became a priest: those terms changed all,
I was good enough for that, nor cheated so;
I could live thus and still hold head erect.
Now you see why I may have been before
A fribble and coxcomb, yet, as priest, break word
Nowise, to make you disbelieve me now.
I need that you should know my truth. Well, then,
According to prescription did I live,
—Conformed myself, both read the breviary
And wrote the rhymes, was punctual to my place
I' the Pieve, and as diligent at my post
Where beauty and fashion rule. I throve apace,

Sub-deacon, Canon, the authority
For delicate play at tarocs, and arbiter
O' the magnitude of fan-mounts: all the while
Wanting no whit the advantage of a hint
Benignant to the promising pupil,—thus:
"Enough attention to the Countess now,
"The young one; 't is her mother rules the roast,
"We know where, and puts in a word: go pay
"Devoir to-morrow morning after mass!
"Break that rash promise to preach, Passion-week!
"Has it escaped you the Archbishop grunts
"And snuffles when one grieves to tell his Grace
"No soul dares treat the subject of the day
"Since his own masterly handling it (ha, ha!)
"Five years ago,—when somebody could help
"And touch up an odd phrase in time of need,
"(He, he!)—and somebody helps you, my son!
"Therefore, don't prove so indispensable
"At the Pieve, sit more loose i' the seat, nor grow
"A fixture by attendance morn and eve!
"Arezzo 's just a haven midway Rome—
"Rome 's the eventual harbour,—make for port,
"Crowd sail, crack cordage! And your cargo be
"A polished presence, a genteel manner, wit
"At will, and tact at every pore of you!
"I sent our lump of learning, Brother Clout,

"And Father Slouch, our piece of piety,
"To see Rome and try suit the Cardinal.
"Thither they clump-clumped, beads and book in hand,
"And ever since 't is meat for man and maid
"How both flopped down, prayed blessing on bent pate
"Bald many an inch beyond the tonsure's need,
"Never once dreaming, the two moony dolts,
"There 's nothing moves his Eminence so much
"As—far from all this awe at sanctitude—
"Heads that wag, eyes that twinkle, modified mirth
"At the closet-lectures on the Latin tongue
"A lady learns so much by, we know where.
"Why, body o' Bacchus, you should crave his rule
"For pauses in the elegiac couplet, chasms
"Permissible only to Catullus! There!
"Now go to duty: brisk, break Priscian's head
"By reading the day's office—there 's no help.
"You 've Ovid in your poke to plaster that;
"Amen 's at the end of all: then sup with me!"

Well, after three or four years of this life,
In prosecution of my calling, I
Found myself at the theatre one night
With a brother Canon, in a mood and mind
Proper enough for the place, amused or no:
When I saw enter, stand, and seat herself

A lady, young, tall, beautiful, strange and sad.
It was as when, in our cathedral once,
As I got yawningly through matin-song,
I saw *facchini* bear a burden up,
Base it on the high-altar, break away
A board or two, and leave the thing inside
Lofty and lone: and lo, when next I looked,
There was the Rafael! I was still one stare,
When—"Nay, I 'll make her give you back your gaze"—
Said Canon Conti; and at the word he tossed
A paper-twist of comfits to her lap,
And dodged and in a trice was at my back
Nodding from over my shoulder. Then she turned,
Looked our way, smiled the beautiful sad strange smile.
"Is not she fair? 'T is my new cousin," said he:
"The fellow lurking there i' the black o' the box
"Is Guido, the old scapegrace: she 's his wife,
"Married three years since: how his Countship sulks!
"He has brought little back from Rome beside,
"After the bragging, bullying. A fair face,
"And—they do say—a pocketful of gold
"When he can worry both her parents dead.
"I don't go much there, for the chamber 's cold
"And the coffee pale. I got a turn at first
"Paying my duty: I observed they crouched
"—The two old frightened family spectres—close

"In a corner, each on each like mouse on mouse
"I' the cat's cage: ever since, I stay at home.
"Hallo, there 's Guido, the black, mean and small,
"Bends his brows on us—please to bend your own
"On the shapely nether limbs of Light-skirts there
"By way of a diversion! I was a fool
"To fling the sweetmeats. Prudence, for God's love!
"To-morrow I 'll make my peace, e'en tell some fib,
"Try if I can't find means to take you there."

That night and next day did the gaze endure,
Burnt to my brain, as sunbeam thro' shut eyes,
And not once changed the beautiful sad strange smile.
At vespers Conti leaned beside my seat
I' the choir,—part said, part sung—"*In ex-cel-sis*—
"All 's to no purpose; I have louted low,
"But he saw you staring—*quia sub*—don't incline
"To know you nearer: him we would not hold
"For Hercules,—the man would lick your shoe
"If you and certain efficacious friends
"Managed him warily,—but there 's the wife:
"Spare her, because he beats her, as it is,
"She 's breaking her heart quite fast enough—*jam tu*—
"So, be you rational and make amends
"With little Light-skirts yonder—*in secula*
"*Secu-lo-o-o-o-rum.* Ah, you rogue! Every one knows

"What great dame she makes jealous: one against one,
"Play, and win both!"
Sirs, ere the week was out,
I saw and said to myself "Light-skirts hides teeth
"Would make a dog sick,—the great dame shows spite
"Should drive a cat mad: 't is but poor work this—
"Counting one's fingers till the sonnet 's crowned.
"I doubt much if Marino really be
"A better bard than Dante after all.
"'T is more amusing to go pace at eve
"I' the Duomo,—watch the day's last gleam outside
"Turn, as into a skirt of God's own robe,
"Those lancet-windows' jewelled miracle,—
"Than go eat the Archbishop's ortolans,
"Digest his jokes. Luckily Lent is near:
"Who cares to look will find me in my stall
"At the Pieve, constant to this faith at least—
"Never to write a canzonet any more."

So, next week, 't was my patron spoke abrupt,
In altered guise. "Young man, can it be true
"That after all your promise of sound fruit,
"You have kept away from Countess young or old
"And gone play truant in church all day long?
"Are you turning Molinist?" I answered quick:
"Sir, what if I turned Christian? It might be.

"The fact is, I am troubled in my mind,
"Beset and pressed hard by some novel thoughts.
"This your Arezzo is a limited world;
"There 's a strange Pope,—'t is said, a priest who thinks.
"Rome is the port, you say: to Rome I go.
"I will live alone, one does so in a crowd,
"And look into my heart a little." "Lent
"Ended,"—I told friends—"I shall go to Rome."

One evening I was sitting in a muse
Over the opened "Summa," darkened round
By the mid-March twilight, thinking how my life
Had shaken under me,—broke short indeed
And showed the gap 'twixt what is, what should be,—
And into what abysm the soul may slip,
Leave aspiration here, achievement there,
Lacking omnipotence to connect extremes—
Thinking moreover . . . oh, thinking, if you like,
How utterly dissociated was I
A priest and celibate, from the sad strange wife
Of Guido,—just as an instance to the point,
Nought more,—how I had a whole store of strengths
Eating into my heart, which craved employ,
And she, perhaps, need of a finger's help,—
And yet there was no way in the wide world
To stretch out mine and so relieve myself,—

How when the page o' the Summa preached its best,
Her smile kept glowing out of it, as to mock
The silence we could break by no one word,—
There came a tap without the chamber-door,
And a whisper; when I bade who tapped speak out.
And, in obedience to my summons, last
In glided a masked muffled mystery,
Laid lightly a letter on the opened book,
Then stood with folded arms and foot demure,
Pointing as if to mark the minutes' flight.

I took the letter, read to the effect
That she, I lately flung the comfits to,
Had a warm heart to give me in exchange,
And gave it,—loved me and confessed it thus,
And bade me render thanks by word of mouth,
Going that night to such a side o' the house
Where the small terrace overhangs a street
Blind and deserted, not the street in front:
Her husband being away, the surly patch,
At his villa of Vittiano.

"And you?"—I asked:
"What may you be?" "Count Guido's kind of maid—
"Most of us have two functions in his house.
"We all hate him, the lady suffers much,

" 'T is just we show compassion, furnish help,
" Specially since her choice is fixed so well.
" What answer may I bring to cheer the sweet
" Pompilia?"

Then I took a pen and wrote
" No more of this! That you are fair, I know:
" But other thoughts now occupy my mind.
" I should not thus have played the insensible
" Once on a time. What made you,—may one ask,—
" Marry your hideous husband? 'T was a fault,
" And now you taste the fruit of it. Farewell."

" There!" smiled I as she snatched it and was gone—
" There, let the jealous miscreant,—Guido's self,
" Whose mean soul grins through this transparent trick,—
" Be baulked so far, defrauded of his aim!
" What fund of satisfaction to the knave,
" Had I kicked this his messenger down stairs,
" Trussed to the middle of her impudence,
" And set his heart at ease so! No, indeed!
" There 's the reply which he shall turn and twist
" At pleasure, snuff at till his brain grow drunk,
" As the bear does when he finds a scented glove
" That puzzles him,—a hand and yet no hand,
" Of other perfume than his own foul paw!

" Last month, I had doubtless chosen to play the dupe,
" Accepted the mock-invitation, kept
" The sham appointment, cudgel beneath cloak,
" Prepared myself to pull the appointer's self
" Out of the window from his hiding-place
" Behind the gown of this part-messenger
" Part-mistress who would personate the wife.
" Such had seemed once a jest permissible:
" Now I am not i' the mood."
Back next morn brought
The messenger, a second letter in hand.
" You are cruel, Thyrsis, and Myrtilla moans
" Neglected but adores you, makes request
" For mercy: why is it you dare not come?
" Such virtue is scarce natural to your age.
" You must love someone else; I hear you do,
" The Baron's daughter or the Advocate's wife,
" Or both,—all 's one, would you make me the third—
" I take the crumbs from table gratefully
" Nor grudge who feasts there. 'Faith, I blush and blaze!
" Yet if I break all bounds, there 's reason sure.
" Are you determinedly bent on Rome?
" I am wretched here, a monster tortures me:
" Carry me with you! Come and say you will!

" Concert this very evening! Do not write!
" I am ever at the window of my room
" Over the terrace, at the *Ave.* Come!"

I questioned—lifting half the woman's mask
To let her smile loose. " So, you gave my line
" To the merry lady?" " She kissed off the wax,
" And put what paper was not kissed away,
" In her bosom to go burn: but merry, no!
" She wept all night when evening brought no friend,
" Alone, the unkind missive at her breast;
" Thus Philomel, the thorn at her breast too,
" Sings" . . . " Writes this second letter?" " Even so!
" Then she may peep at vespers forth?"—" What risk
" Do we run o' the husband?"—" Ah,—no risk at all!
" He is more stupid even than jealous. Ah—
" That was the reason? Why, the man 's away!
" Beside, his bugbear is that friend of yours,
" Fat little Canon Conti. He fears him,
" How should he dream of you? I told you truth:
" He goes to the villa at Vittiano—'t is
" The time when Spring-sap rises in the vine—
" Spends the night there. And then his wife 's a child:
" Does he think a child outwits him? A mere child:
" Yet so full grown, a dish for any duke.
" Don't quarrel longer with such cates, but come!"

I wrote "In vain do you solicit me.
" I am a priest: and you are wedded wife,
" Whatever kind of brute your husband prove.'
" I have scruples, in short. Yet should you really show
" Sign at the window . . . but nay, best be good!
" My thoughts are elsewhere," " Take her that!"
" Again
" Let the incarnate meanness, cheat and spy,
" Mean to the marrow of him, make his heart
" His food, anticipate hell's worm once more!
" Let him watch shivering at the window—ay,
" And let this hybrid, this his light-of-love
" And lackey-of-lies,—a sage economy,—
" Paid with embracings for the rank brass coin,—
" Let her report and make him chuckle o'er
" The break-down of my resolution now,
" And lour at disappointment in good time!
" —So tantalize and so enrage by turns,
" Until the two fall each on the other like
" Two famished spiders, as the coveted fly
" That toys long, leaves their net and them at last!"
And so the missives followed thick and fast
For a month, say,—I still came at every turn
On the soft sly adder, endlong 'neath my tread.
I was met i' the street, made sign to in the church,
A slip was found i' the door-sill, scribbled word

'Twixt page and page o' the prayer-book in my place.
A crumpled thing dropped even before my feet,
Pushed through the blind, above the terrace-rail,
As I passed, by day, the very window once.
And ever from corners would be peering up
The messenger, with the self-same demand
" Obdurate still, no flesh but adamant?
" Nothing to cure the wound, assuage the throe
" O' the sweetest lamb that ever loved a bear?"
And ever my one answer in one tone—
" Go your ways, temptress! Let a priest read, pray,
" Unplagued of vain talk, visions not for him!
" In the end, you 'll have your will and ruin me!"

One day, a variation: thus I read:
" You have gained little by timidity.
" My husband has found out my love at length,
" Sees cousin Conti was the stalking-horse,
" And you the game he covered, poor fat soul!
" My husband is a formidable foe,
" Will stick at nothing to destroy you. Stand
" Prepared, or better, run till you reach Rome!
" I bade you visit me, when the last place
" My tyrant would have turned suspicious at,
" Or cared to seek you in, was . . . why say, where?
" But now all 's changed: beside, the season 's past

" At the villa,—wants the master's eye no more.
" Anyhow, I beseech you, stay away
" From the window! He might well be posted there."

I wrote—" You raise my courage, or call up
" My curiosity, who am but man.
" Tell him he owns the palace, not the street
" Under—that 's his and yours and mine alike.
" If it should please me pad the path this eve,
" Guido will have two troubles, first to get
" Into a rage and then get out again.
" Be cautious, though: at the *Ave!*"
You of the Court!
When I stood question here and reached this point
O' the narrative,—search notes and see and say
If someone did not interpose with smile
And sneer, " And prithee why so confident
" That the husband must, of all needs, not the wife,
" Fabricate thus,—what if the lady loved?
" What if she wrote the letters?"
Learned Sir,
I told you there 's a picture in our church.
Well, if a low-browed verger sidled up
Bringing me, like a blotch, on his prod's point,
A transfixed scorpion, let the reptile writhe,
And then said " See a thing that Rafael made—

" This venom issued from Madonna's mouth!"
I should reply, " Rather, the soul of you
" Has issued from your body, like from like,
" By way of the ordure-corner!"
But no less,
I tired of the same long black teasing lie
Obtruded thus at every turn; the pest
Was far too near the picture, anyhow:
One does Madonna service, making clowns
Remove their dung-heap from the sacristy.
" I will to the window, as he tempts," said I:
" Yes, whom the easy love has failed allure,
" This new bait of adventure tempts,—thinks he.
" Though the imprisoned lady keeps afar,
" There will they lie in ambush, heads alert,
" Kith, kin, and Count mustered to bite my heel.
" No mother nor brother viper of the brood
" Shall scuttle off without the instructive bruise!"

So I went: crossed street and street: "The next street's turn,
" I stand beneath the terrace, see, above,
" The black of the ambush-window. Then, in place
" Of hand's throw of soft prelude over lute,
" And cough that clears way for the ditty last,"—
I began to laugh already—" he will have

" 'Out of the hole you hide in, on to the front,
" 'Count Guido Franceschini, show yourself!
" 'Hear what a man thinks of a thing like you,
" 'And after, take this foulness in your face!'"

The words lay living on my lip, I made
The one-turn more—and there at the window stood,
Framed in its black square length, with lamp in hand,
Pompilia; the same great, grave, griefful air
As stands i' the dusk, on altar that I know,
Left alone with one moonbeam in her cell,
Our Lady of all the Sorrows. Ere I knelt—
Assured myself that she was flesh and blood—
She had looked one look and vanished.
I thought—"Just so:
"It was herself, they have set her there to watch—
"Stationed to see some wedding-band go by,
"On fair pretence that she must bless the bride,
"Or wait some funeral with friends wind past,
"And crave peace for the corpse that claims its due.
"She never dreams they used her for a snare,
"And now withdraw the bait has served its turn.
"Well done, the husband, who shall fare the worse!"
And on my lip again was— "Out with thee,
"Guido!" When all at once she re-appeared;
But, this time, on the terrace overhead,

So close above me, she could almost touch
My head if she bent down; and she did bend,
While I stood still as stone, all eye, all ear.

She began—"You have sent me letters, Sir:
"I have read none, I can neither read nor write;
"But she you gave them to, a woman here,
"One of the people in whose power I am,
"Partly explained their sense, I think, to me
"Obliged to listen while she inculcates
"That you, a priest, can dare love me, a wife,
"Desire to live or die as I shall bid,
"(She makes me listen if I will or no)
"Because you saw my face a single time.
"It cannot be she says the thing you mean;
"Such wickedness were deadly to us both:
"But good true love would help me now so much—
"I tell myself, you may mean good and true.
"You offer me, I seem to understand,
"Because I am in poverty and starve,
"Much money, where one piece would save my life.
"The silver cup upon the altar-cloth
"Is neither yours to give nor mine to take;
"But I might take one bit of bread therefrom,
"Since I am starving, and return the rest,
"Yet do no harm: this is my very case.

"I am in that strait, I may not dare abstain
"From so much of assistance as would bring
"The guilt of theft on neither you nor me;
"But no superfluous particle of aid.
"I think, if you will let me state my case,
"Even had you been so fancy-fevered here,
"Not your sound self, you must grow healthy now—
"Care only to bestow what I can take.
"That it is only you in the wide world,
"Knowing me nor in thought nor word nor deed,
"Who, all unprompted save by your own heart,
"Come proffering assistance now,—were strange
"But that my whole life is so strange: as strange
"It is, my husband whom I have not wronged
"Should hate and harm me. For his own soul's sake,
"Hinder the harm! But there is something more,
"And that the strangest: it has got to be
"Somehow for my sake too, and yet not mine,
"—This is a riddle—for some kind of sake
"Not any clearer to myself than you,
"And yet as certain as that I draw breath,—
"I would fain live, not die—oh no, not die!
"My case is, I was dwelling happily
"At Rome with those dear Comparini, called
"Father and mother to me; when at once
"I found I had become Count Guido's wife:

" Who then, not waiting for a moment, changed
" Into a fury of fire, if once he was
" Merely a man: his face threw fire at mine,
" He laid a hand on me that burned all peace,
" All joy, all hope, and last all fear away,
" Dipping the bough of life, so pleasant once,
" In fire which shrivelled leaf and bud alike,
" Burning not only present life but past,
" Which you might think was safe beyond his reach.
" He reached it, though, since that beloved pair,
" My father once, my mother all those years,
" That loved me so, now say I dreamed a dream
" And bid me wake, henceforth no child of theirs,
" Never in all the time their child at all.
" Do you understand? I cannot: yet so it is.
" Just so I say of you that proffer help:
" I cannot understand what prompts your soul,
" I simply needs must see that it is so,
" Only one strange and wonderful thing more.
" They came here with me, those two dear ones, kept
" All the old love up, till my husband, till
" His people here so tortured them, they fled.
" And now, is it because I grow in flesh
" And spirit one with him their torturer,
" That they, renouncing him, must cast off me?
" If I were graced by God to have a child,

"Could I one day deny God graced me so?
"Then, since my husband hates me, I shall break
"No law that reigns in this fell house of hate,
"By using—letting have effect so much
"Of hate as hides me from that whole of hate
"Would take my life which I want and must have—
"Just as I take from your excess of love
"Enough to save my life with, all I need.
"The Archbishop said to murder me were sin:
"My leaving Guido were a kind of death
"With no sin,—more death, he must answer for.
"Hear now what death to him and life to you
"I wish to pay and owe. Take me to Rome!
"You go to Rome, the servant makes me hear.
"Take me as you would take a dog, I think,
"Masterless left for strangers to maltreat:
"Take me home like that—leave me in the house
"Where the father and the mother are; and soon
"They 'll come to know and call me by my name,
"Their child once more, since child I am, for all
"They now forget me, which is the worst o' the dream—
"And the way to end dreams is to break them, stand,
"Walk, go: then help me to stand, walk and go!
"The Governor said the strong should help the weak:
"You know how weak the strongest women are.
"How could I find my way there by myself?

"I cannot even call out, make them hear—
"Just as in dreams: I have tried and proved the fact.
"I have told this story and more to good great men,
"The Archbishop and the Governor: they smiled.
"'Stop your mouth, fair one!'—presently they frowned,
"'Get you gone, disengage you from our feet!'
"I went in my despair to an old priest,
"Only a friar, no great man like these two,
"But good, the Augustinian, people name
"Romano,—he confessed me two months since:
"He fears God, why then needs he fear the world?
"And when he questioned how it came about
"That I was found in danger of a sin—
"Despair of any help from providence,—
"'Since, though your husband outrage you,' said he,
"'That is a case too common, the wives die
"'Or live, but do not sin so deep as this'—
"Then I told—what I never will tell you—
"How, worse than husband's hate, I had to bear
"The love,—soliciting to shame called love,—
"Of his brother,—the young idle priest i' the house
"With only the devil to meet there. 'This is grave—
"'Yes, we must interfere: I counsel,—write
"'To those who used to be your parents once,
"'Of dangers here, bid them convey you hence!'
"'But,' said I, 'when I neither read nor write?'

"Then he took pity and promised 'I will write.'
"If he did so,—why, they are dumb or dead:
"Either they give no credit to the tale,
"Or else, wrapped wholly up in their own joy
"Of such escape, they care not who cries, still
"I' the clutches. Anyhow, no word arrives.
"All such extravagance and dreadfulness
"Seems incident to dreaming, cured one way,—
"Wake me! The letter I received this morn,
"Said—if the woman spoke your very sense—
"'You would die for me:' I can believe it now:
"For now the dream gets to involve yourself.
"First of all, you seemed wicked and not good,
"In writing me those letters: you came in
"Like a thief upon me. I this morning said
"In my extremity, entreat the thief!
"Try if he have in him no honest touch!
"A thief might save me from a murderer.
"'T was a thief said the last kind word to Christ:
"Christ took the kindness and forgave the theft:
"And so did I prepare what I now say.
"But now, that you stand and I see your face,
"Though you have never uttered word yet,—well, I know,
"Here too has been dream-work, delusion too,
"And that at no time, you with the eyes here,
"Ever intended to do wrong by me,

"Nor wrote such letters therefore. It is false,
"And you are true, have been true, will be true.
"To Rome then,—when is it you take me there?
"Each minute lost is mortal. When?—I ask."

I answered "It shall be when it can be.
"I will go hence and do your pleasure, find
"The sure and speedy means of travel, then
"Come back and take you to your friends in Rome.
"There wants a carriage, money and the rest,—
"A day's work by to-morrow at this time.
"How shall I see you and assure escape?"

She replied, "Pass, to-morrow at this hour.
"If I am at the open window, well:
"If I am absent, drop a handkerchief
"And walk by! I shall see from where I watch,
"And know that all is done. Return next eve,
"And next, and so till we can meet and speak!"
"To-morrow at this hour I pass," said I.
She was withdrawn.

Here is another point
I bid you pause at. When I told thus far,
Someone said, subtly, "Here at least was found
"Your confidence in error,—you perceived
"The spirit of the letters, in a sort,

"Had been the lady's, if the body should be
"Supplied by Guido: say, he forged them all!
"Here was the unforged fact—she sent for you,
"Spontaneously elected you to help,
"—What men call, loved you: Guido read her mind,
"Gave it expression to assure the world
"The case was just as he foresaw: he wrote,
"She spoke."
Sirs, that first simile serves still,—
That falsehood of a scorpion hatched, I say,
Nowhere i' the world but in Madonna's mouth.
Go on! Suppose, that falsehood foiled, next eve
Pictured Madonna raised her painted hand,
Fixed the face Rafael bent above the Babe,
On my face as I flung me at her feet:
Such miracle vouchsafed and manifest,
Would that prove the first lying tale was true?
Pompilia spoke, and I at once received,
Accepted my own fact, my miracle
Self-authorized and self-explained,—she chose
To summon me and signify her choice.
Afterward,—oh! I gave a passing glance
To a certain ugly cloud-shape, goblin-shred
Of hell-smoke hurrying past the splendid moon
Out now to tolerate no darkness more,
And saw right through the thing that tried to pass

For truth and solid, not an empty lie:
"So, he not only forged the words for her
"But words for me, made letters he called mine:
"What I sent, he retained, gave these in place,
"All by the mistress-messenger! As I
"Recognized her, at potency of truth,
"So she, by the crystalline soul, knew me,
"Never mistook the signs. Enough of this—
"Let the wraith go to nothingness again,
"Here is the orb, have only thought for her!"

"Thought?" nay, Sirs, what shall follow was not thought:
I have thought sometimes, and thought long and hard.
I have stood before, gone round a serious thing,
Tasked my whole mind to touch and clasp it close,
As I stretch forth my arm to touch this bar.
God and man, and what duty I owe both,—
I dare to say I have confronted these
In thought: but no such faculty helped here.
I put forth no thought,—powerless, all that night
I paced the city: it was the first Spring.
By the invasion I lay passive to,
In rushed new things, the old were rapt away;
Alike abolished—the imprisonment
Of the outside air, the inside weight o' the world
That pulled me down. Death meant, to spurn the ground,

Soar to the sky,—die well and you do that.
The very immolation made the bliss;
Death was the heart of life, and all the harm
My folly had crouched to avoid, now proved a veil
Hiding all gain my wisdom strove to grasp:
As if the intense centre of the flame
Should turn a heaven to that devoted fly
Which hitherto, sophist alike and sage,
Saint Thomas with his sober grey goose-quill,
And sinner Plato by Cephisian reed,
Would fain, pretending just the insect's good,
Whisk off, drive back, consign to shade again.
Into another state, under new rule
I knew myself was passing swift and sure;
Whereof the initiatory pang approached,
Felicitous annoy, as bitter-sweet
As when the virgin-band, the victors chaste,
Feel at the end the earthly garments drop,
And rise with something of a rosy shame
Into immortal nakedness: so I
Lay, and let come the proper throe would thrill
Into the ecstasy and outthrob pain.

I' the grey of dawn it was I found myself
Facing the pillared front o' the Pieve—mine,
My church: it seemed to say for the first time

" But am not I the Bride, the mystic love
" O' the Lamb, who took thy plighted troth, my priest,
" To fold thy warm heart on my heart of stone
" And freeze thee nor unfasten any more?
" This is a fleshly woman,—let the free
" Bestow their life-blood, thou art pulseless now!"
See! Day by day I had risen and left this church
At the signal waved me by some foolish fan,
With half a curse and half a pitying smile
For the monk I stumbled over in my haste,
Prostrate and corpse-like at the altar-foot
Intent on his *corona*: then the church
Was ready with her quip, if word conduced,
To quicken my pace nor stop for prating—" There!
" Be thankful you are no such ninny, go
" Rather to teach a black-eyed novice cards
" Than gabble Latin and protrude that nose
" Smoothed to a sheep's through no brains and much faith!"
That sort of incentive! Now the church changed tone—
Now, when I found out first that life and death
Are means to an end, that passion uses both,
Indisputably mistress of the man
Whose form of worship is self-sacrifice:
Now, from the stone lungs sighed the scrannel voice
" Leave that live passion, come be dead with me!"
As if, i' the fabled garden, I had gone

On great adventure, plucked in ignorance
Hedge-fruit, and feasted to satiety,
Laughing at such high fame for hips and haws,
And scorned the achievement: then come all at once
O' the prize o' the place, the thing of perfect gold,
The apple's self: and, scarce my eye on that,
Was 'ware as well o' the seven-fold dragon's watch.

Sirs, I obeyed. Obedience was too strange,—
This new thing that had been struck into me
By the look o' the lady,—to dare disobey
The first authoritative word. 'T was God's.
I had been lifted to the level of her,
Could take such sounds into my sense. I said
"We two are cognisant o' the Master now;
"She it is bids me bow the head: how true,
"I am a priest! I see the function here;
"I thought the other way self-sacrifice:
"This is the true, seals up the perfect sum.
"I pay it, sit down, silently obey."

So, I went home. Dawn broke, noon broadened, I—
I sat stone-still, let time run over me.
The sun slanted into my room, had reached
The west. I opened book,—Aquinas blazed
With one black name only on the white page.

I looked up, saw the sunset: vespers rang:
"She counts the minutes till I keep my word
"And come say all is ready. I am a priest.
"Duty to God is duty to her: I think
"God, who created her, will save her too
"Some new way, by one miracle the more,
"Without me. Then, prayer may avail perhaps."
I went to my own place i' the Pieve, read
The office: I was back at home again
Sitting i' the dark. "Could she but know—but know
"That, were there good in this distinct from God's,
"Really good as it reached her, though procured
"By a sin of mine,—I should sin: God forgives.
"She knows it is no fear withholds me: fear?
"Of what? Suspense here is the terrible thing.
"If she should, as she counts the minutes, come
"On the fantastic notion that I fear
"The world now, fear the Archbishop, fear perhaps
"Count Guido, he who, having forged the lies,
"May wait the work, attend the effect,—I fear
"The sword of Guido! Let God see to that—
"Hating lies, let not her believe a lie!"

Again the morning found me. "I will work,
"Tie down my foolish thoughts. Thank God so far!
"I have saved her from a scandal, stopped the tongues

" Had broken else into a cackle and hiss
" Around the noble name. Duty is still
" Wisdom: I have been wise." So the day wore.

At evening—" But, achieving victory,
" I must not blink the priest's peculiar part,
" Nor shrink to counsel, comfort: priest and friend—
" How do we discontinue to be friends?
" I will go minister, advise her seek
" Help at the source,—above all, not despair:
" There may be other happier help at hand.
" I hope it,—wherefore then neglect to say?"

There she stood—leaned there, for the second time,
Over the terrace, looked at me, then spoke:
" Why is it you have suffered me to stay
" Breaking my heart two days more than was need?
" Why delay help, your own heart yearns to give?
" You are again here, in the self-same mind,
" I see here, steadfast in the face of you,—
" You grudge to do no one thing that I ask.
" Why then is nothing done? You know my need.
" Still, through God's pity on me, there is time
" And one day more: shall I be saved or no?"
I answered—" Lady, waste no thought, no word
" Even to forgive me! Care for what I care—

"Only! Now follow me as I were fate!
"Leave this house in the dark to-morrow night,
"Just before daybreak :—there 's new moon this eve—
"It sets, and then begins the solid black.
"Descend, proceed to the Torrione, step
"Over the low dilapidated wall,
"Take San Clemente, there 's no other gate
"Unguarded at the hour: some paces thence
"An inn stands; cross to it; I shall be there."

She answered, "If I can but find the way.
"But I shall find it. Go now!"

I did go,
Took rapidly the route myself prescribed,
Stopped at Torrione, climbed the ruined place,
Proved that the gate was practicable, reached
The inn, no eye, despite the dark, could miss,
Knocked there and entered, made the host secure:
"With Caponsacchi it is ask and have;
"I know my betters. Are you bound for Rome?
"I get swift horse and trusty man," said he.

Then I retraced my steps, was found once more
In my own house for the last time: there lay
The broad pale opened Summa. "Shut his book,

"There 's other showing! 'T was a Thomas too
"Obtained,—more favoured than his namesake here,—
"A gift, tied faith fast, foiled the tug of doubt,—
"Our Lady's girdle; down he saw it drop
"As she ascended into heaven, they say:
"He kept that safe and bade all doubt adieu.
"I too have seen a lady and hold a grace."

I know not how the night passed: morning broke;
Presently came my servant. "Sir, this eve—
"Do you forget?" I started. "How forget?
"What is it you know?" "With due submission, Sir,
"This being last Monday in the month but one
"And a vigil, since to-morrow is Saint George,
"And feast day, and moreover day for copes,
"And Canon Conti now away a month,
"And Canon Crispi sour because, forsooth,
"You let him sulk in stall and bear the brunt
"Of the octave . . . Well, Sir, 't is important!"
"True!
"Hearken, I have to start for Rome this night.
"No word, lest Crispi overboil and burst!
"Provide me with a laic dress! Throw dust
"I' the Canon's eye, stop his tongue's scandal so!
"See there 's a sword in case of accident."
I knew the knave, the knave knew me.

And thus
Through each familiar hindrance of the day
Did I make steadily for its hour and end,—
Felt time's old barrier-growth of right and fit
Give way through all its twines, and let me go.
Use and wont recognized the excepted man,
Let speed the special service,—and I sped
Till, at the dead between midnight and morn,
There was I at the goal, before the gate,
With a tune in the ears, low leading up to loud,
A light in the eyes, faint that would soon be flare,
Ever some spiritual witness new and new
In faster frequence, crowding solitude
To watch the way o' the warfare,—till, at last,
When the ecstatic minute must bring birth,
Began a whiteness in the distance, waxed
Whiter and whiter, near grew and more near,
Till it was she: there did Pompilia come:
The white I saw shine through her was her soul's,
Certainly, for the body was one black,
Black from head down to foot. She did not speak,
Glided into the carriage,—so a cloud
Gathers the moon up. "By San Spirito,
"To Rome, as if the road burned underneath!
"Reach Rome, then hold my head in pledge, I pay
"The run and the risk to heart's content!" Just that

I said,—then, in another tick of time,
Sprang, was beside her, she and I alone.

So it began, our flight thro' dusk to clear,
Through day and night and day again to night
Once more, and to last dreadful dawn of all.
Sirs, how should I lie quiet in my grave
Unless you suffer me wring, drop by drop,
My brain dry, make a riddance of the drench
Of minutes with a memory in each,
Recorded motion, breath or look of hers,
Which poured forth would present you one pure glass,
Mirror you plain,—as God's sea, glassed in gold,
His saints,—the perfect soul Pompilia? Men,
You must know that a man gets drunk with truth
Stagnant inside him! Oh, they 've killed her, Sirs!
Can I be calm?
Calmly! Each incident
Proves, I maintain, that action of the flight
For the true thing it was. The first faint scratch
O' the stone will test its nature, teach its worth
To idiots who name Parian—coprolite.
After all, I shall give no glare—at best
Only display you certain scattered lights
Lamping the rush and roll of the abyss:
Nothing but here and there a fire-point pricks

Wavelet from wavelet: well! For the first hour
We both were silent in the night, I know:
Sometimes I did not see nor understand.
Blackness engulphed me,—partial stupor, say—
Then I would break way, breathe through the surprise,
And be aware again, and see who sat
In the dark vest with the white face and hands.
I said to myself—"I have caught it, I conceive
"The mind o' the mystery: 't is the way they wake
"And wait, two martyrs somewhere in a tomb
"Each by each as their blessing was to die;
"Some signal they are promised and expect,—
"When to arise before the trumpet scares:
"So, through the whole course of the world they wait
"The last day, but so fearless and so safe!
"No otherwise, in safety and not fear,
"I lie, because she lies too by my side."
You know this is not love, Sirs,—it is faith,
The feeling that there 's God, he reigns and rules
Out of this low world: that is all; no harm!
At times she drew a soft sigh—music seemed
Always to hover just above her lips,
Not settle,—break a silence music too.

In the determined morning, I first found

Her head erect, her face turned full to me,
Her soul intent on mine through two wide eyes.
I answered them. "You are saved hitherto.
"We have passed Perugia,—gone round by the wood,
"Not through, I seem to think,—and opposite
"I know Assisi; this is holy ground."
Then she resumed. "How long since we both left
"Arezzo?" "Years—and certain hours beside."

It was at . . . ah, but I forget the names!
'T is a mere post-house and a hovel or two;
I left the carriage and got bread and wine
And brought it her. "Does it detain to eat?"
"They stay perforce, change horses,—therefore eat!
"We lose no minute: we arrive, be sure!"
This was—I know not where—there 's a great hill
Close over, and the stream has lost its bridge,
One fords it. She began—"I have heard say
"Of some sick body that my mother knew,
"'T was no good sign when in a limb diseased
"All the pain suddenly departs,—as if
"The guardian angel discontinued pain
"Because the hope of cure was gone at last:
"The limb will not again exert itself,
"It needs be pained no longer: so with me,
"—My soul whence all the pain is past at once:

"All pain must be to work some good in the end.
"True, this I feel now, this may be that good,
"Pain was because of,—otherwise, I fear!"

She said,—a long while later in the day,
When I had let the silence be,—abrupt—
"Have you a mother?" "She died, I was born."
"A sister then?" "No sister." "Who was it—
"What woman were you used to serve this way,
"Be kind to, till I called you and you came?"
I did not like that word. Soon afterward—
"Tell me, are men unhappy, in some kind
"Of mere unhappiness at being men,
"As women suffer, being womanish?
"Have you, now, some unhappiness, I mean,
"Born of what may be man's strength overmuch,
"To match the undue susceptibility,
"The sense at every pore when hate is close?
"It hurts us if a baby hides its face
"Or child strikes at us punily, calls names
"Or makes a mouth,—much more if stranger men
"Laugh or frown,—just as that were much to bear!
"Yet rocks split,—and the blow-ball does no more,
"Quivers to feathery nothing at a touch;
"And strength may have its drawback weakness scapes."

Once she asked "What is it that made you smile,
"At the great gate with the eagles and the snakes,
"Where the company entered, 't is a long time since?"
"—Forgive—I think you would not understand:
"Ah, but you ask me,—therefore, it was this.
"That was a certain bishop's villa-gate,
"I knew it by the eagles,—and at once
"Remembered this same bishop was just he
"People of old were wont to bid me please
"If I would catch preferment: so, I smiled
"Because an impulse came to me, a whim—
"What if I prayed the prelate leave to speak,
"Began upon him in his presence-hall
"—'What, still at work so grey and obsolete?
"'Still rocheted and mitred more or less?
"'Don't you feel all that out of fashion now?
"'I find out when the day of things is done!'"

At eve we heard the *angelus*: she turned—
"I told you I can neither read nor write.
"My life stopped with the play-time; I will learn,
"If I begin to live again: but you—
"Who are a priest—wherefore do you not read
"The service at this hour? Read Gabriel's song,
"The lesson, and then read the little prayer

"To Raphael, proper for us travellers!"
I did not like that, neither, but I read.

When we stopped at Foligno it was dark.
The people of the post came out with lights:
The driver said, "This time to-morrow, may
"Saints only help, relays continue good,
"Nor robbers hinder, we arrive at Rome."
I urged, "Why tax your strength a second night?
"Trust me, alight here and take brief repose!
"We are out of harm's reach, past pursuit: go sleep
"If but an hour! I keep watch, guard the while
"Here in the doorway." But her whole face changed,
The misery grew again about her mouth,
The eyes burned up from faintness, like the fawn's
Tired to death in the thicket, when she feels
The probing spear o' the huntsman. "Oh, no stay!"
She cried, in the fawn's cry, "On to Rome, on, on—
"Unless 't is you who fear,—which cannot be!"

We did go on all night; but at its close
She was troubled, restless, moaned low, talked at whiles
To herself, her brow on quiver with the dream:
Once, wide awake, she menaced, at arms' length
Waved away something—"Never again with you!
"My soul is mine, my body is my soul's:

"You and I are divided ever more
"In soul and body: get you gone!" Then I—
"Why, in my whole life I have never prayed!
"Oh, if the God, that only can, would help!
"Am I his priest with power to cast out fiends?
"Let God arise and all his enemies
"Be scattered!" By morn, there was peace, no sigh
Out of the deep sleep.

When she woke at last,
I answered the first look—"Scarce twelve hours more,
"Then, Rome! There probably was no pursuit,
"There cannot now be peril: bear up brave!
"Just some twelve hours to press through to the prize:
"Then, no more of the terrible journey!" "Then,
"No more o' the journey: if it might but last!
"Always, my life-long, thus to journey still!
"It is the interruption that I dread,—
"With no dread, ever to be here and thus!
"Never to see a face nor hear a voice!
"Yours is no voice; you speak when you are dumb;
"Nor face, I see it in the dark. I want
"No face nor voice that change and grow unkind."
That I liked, that was the best thing she said.

In the broad day, I dared entreat, "Descend!"

I told a woman, at the garden-gate
By the post-house, white and pleasant in the sun,
" It is my sister,—talk with her apart!
" She is married and unhappy, you perceive;
" I take her home because her head is hurt;
" Comfort her as you women understand!"
So, there I left them by the garden-wall,
Paced the road, then bade put the horses to,
Came back, and there she sat: close to her knee,
A black-eyed child still held the bowl of milk,
Wondered to see how little she could drink,
And in her arms the woman's infant lay.
She smiled at me " How much good this has done!
" This is a whole night's rest and how much more!
" I can proceed now, though I wish to stay.
" How do you call that tree with the thick top
" That holds in all its leafy green and gold
" The sun now like an immense egg of fire?"
(It was a million-leaved mimosa.) " Take
" The babe away from me and let me go!"
And in the carriage " Still a day, my friend!
" And perhaps half a night, the woman fears.
" I pray it finish since it cannot last:
" There may be more misfortune at the close,
" And where will you be? God suffice me then!"
And presently—for there was a roadside-shrine—

" When I was taken first to my own church
" Lorenzo in Lucina, being a girl,
" And bid confess my faults, I interposed
" ' But teach me what fault to confess and know ! '
" So, the priest said—' You should bethink yourself :
" ' Each human being needs must have done wrong ! '
" Now, be you candid and no priest but friend—
" Were I surprised and killed here on the spot,
" A runaway from husband and his home,
" Do you account it were in sin I died?
" My husband used to seem to harm me, not . . .
" Not on pretence he punished sin of mine,
" Nor for sin's sake and lust of cruelty,
" But as I heard him bid a farming-man
" At the villa take a lamb once to the wood
" And there ill-treat it, meaning that the wolf
" Should hear its cries, and so come, quick be caught,
" Enticed to the trap : he practised thus with me
" That so, whatever were his gain thereby,
" Others than I might become prey and spoil.
" Had it been only between our two selves,—
" His pleasure and my pain,—why, pleasure him
" By dying, nor such need to make a coil !
" But this was worth an effort, that my pain
" Should not become a snare, prove pain threefold
" To other people—strangers—or unborn—

"How should I know? I sought release from that—
"I think, or else from,—dare I say, some cause
"Such as is put into a tree, which turns
"Away from the north wind with what nest it holds,—
"The woman said that trees so turn: now, friend,
"Tell me, because I cannot trust myself!
"You are a man: what have I done amiss?"
You must conceive my answer,—I forget—
Taken up wholly with the thought, perhaps,
This time she might have said,—might, did not say—
"You are a priest." She said, "my friend."
Day wore,
We passed the places, somehow the calm went,
Again the restless eyes began to rove
In new fear of the foe mine could not see.
She wandered in her mind,—addressed me once
"Gaetano!"—that is not my name: whose name?
I grew alarmed, my head seemed turning too.
I quickened pace with promise now, now threat:
Bade drive and drive, nor any stopping more.
"Too deep i' the thick of the struggle, struggle through!
"Then drench her in repose though death's self pour
"The plenitude of quiet,—help us, God,
"Whom the winds carry!"

Suddenly I saw
The old tower, and the little white-walled clump
Of buildings and the cypress-tree or two,—
"Already Castelnuovo—Rome!" I cried,
"As good as Rome,—Rome is the next stage, think!
"This is where travellers' hearts are wont to beat.
"Say you are saved, sweet lady!" Up she woke.
The sky was fierce with colour from the sun
Setting. She screamed out "No, I must not die!
"Take me no farther, I should die: stay here!
"I have more life to save than mine!"
She swooned.
We seemed safe: what was it foreboded so?
Out of the coach into the inn I bore
The motionless and breathless pure and pale
Pompilia,—bore her through a pitying group
And laid her on a couch, still calm and cured
By deep sleep of all woes at once. The host
Was urgent "Let her stay an hour or two!
"Leave her to us, all will be right by morn!"
Oh, my foreboding! But I could not choose.

I paced the passage, kept watch all night long.
I listened,—not one movement, not one sigh.
"Fear not: she sleeps so sound!" they said: but I
Feared, all the same, kept fearing more and more,

Found myself throb with fear from head to foot,
Filled with a sense of such impending woe,
That, at first pause of night, pretence of gray,
I made my mind up it was morn.—"Reach Rome,
"Lest hell reach her! A dozen miles to make,
"Another long breath, and we emerge!" I stood
I' the court-yard, roused the sleepy grooms. "Have out
"Carriage and horse, give haste, take gold!" said I.
While they made ready in the doubtful morn,—
'T was the last minute,—needs must I ascend
And break her sleep; I turned to go.
And there
Faced me Count Guido, there posed the mean man
As master,—took the field, encamped his rights,
Challenged the world: there leered new triumph, there
Scowled the old malice in the visage bad
And black o' the scamp. Soon triumph suppled the tongue
A little, malice glued to his dry throat,
And he part howled, part hissed . . . oh, how he kept
Well out o' the way, at arm's length and to spare!—
"My salutation to your priestship! What?
"Matutinal, busy with book so soon
"Of an April day that 's damp as tears that now
"Deluge Arezzo at its darling's flight?—
"'T is unfair, wrongs feminity at large,

" To let a single dame monopolize
" A heart the whole sex claims, should share alike:
" Therefore I overtake you, Canon! Come!
" The lady,—could you leave her side so soon?
" You have not yet experienced at her hands
" My treatment, you lay down undrugged, I see!
" Hence this alertness—hence no death-in-life
" Like what held arms fast when she stole from mine.
" To be sure, you took the solace and repose
" That first night at Foligno!—news abound
" O' the road by this time,—men regaled me much,
" As past them I came halting after you,
" Vulcan pursuing Mars, as poets sing,—
" Still at the last here pant I, but arrive,
" Vulcan—and not without my Cyclops too,
" The Commissary and the unpoisoned arm
" O' the Civil Force, should Mars turn mutineer.
" Enough of fooling: capture the culprits, friend!
" Here is the lover in the smart disguise
" With the sword,—he is a priest, so mine lies still.
" There upstairs hides my wife the runaway,
" His leman: the two plotted, poisoned first,
" Plundered me after, and eloped thus far
" Where now you find them. Do your duty quick!
" Arrest and hold him! That 's done: now catch her!"
During this speech of that man,—well, I stood

Away, as he managed,—still, I stood as near
The throat of him,—with these two hands, my own,—
As now I stand near yours, Sir,—one quick spring,
One great good satisfying gripe, and lo!
There had he lain abolished with his lie,
Creation purged o' the miscreate, man redeemed,
A spittle wiped off from the face of God!
I, in some measure, seek a poor excuse
For what I left undone, in just this fact
That my first feeling at the speech I quote
Was—not of what a blasphemy was dared,
Not what a bag of venomed purulence
Was split and noisome,—but how splendidly
Mirthful, how ludicrous a lie was launched!
Would Molière's self wish more than hear such man
Call, claim such woman for his own, his wife,
Even though, in due amazement at the boast,
He had stammered, she moreover was divine?
She to be his,—were hardly less absurd
Than that he took her name into his mouth,
Licked, and then let it go again, the beast,
Signed with his slaver. Oh, she poisoned him,
Plundered him, and the rest! Well, what I wished
Was, that he would but go on, say once more
So to the world, and get his meed of men,
The fist's reply to the filth. And while I mused,

The minute, oh the misery, was gone!
On either idle hand of me there stood
Really an officer, nor laughed i' the least;
Nay, rendered justice to his reason, laid
Logic to heart, as 't were submitted them
"Twice two makes four."
"And now, catch her!" he cried.
That sobered me. "Let myself lead the way—
"Ere you arrest me, who am somebody,
"Being, as you hear, a priest and privileged,—
"To the lady's chamber! I presume you—men
"Expert, instructed how to find out truth,
"Familiar with the guise of guilt. Detect
"Guilt on her face when it meets mine, then judge
"Between us and the mad dog howling there!"
Up we all went together, in they broke
O' the chamber late my chapel. There she lay,
Composed as when I laid her, that last eve,
O' the couch, still breathless, motionless, sleep's self,
Wax-white, seraphic, saturate with the sun
O' the morning that now flooded from the front
And filled the window with a light like blood.
"Behold the poisoner, the adulteress,
"—And feigning sleep too! Seize, bind!" Guido hissed.

She started up, stood erect, face to face

With the husband: back he fell, was buttressed there
By the window all a flame with morning-red,
He the black figure, the opprobrious blur
Against all peace and joy and light and life.
"Away from between me and hell!" she cried:
"Hell for me, no embracing any more!
"I am God's, I love God, God—whose knees I clasp,
"Whose utterly most just award I take,
"But bear no more love-making devils: hence!"
I may have made an effort to reach her side
From where I stood i' the door-way,—anyhow
I found the arms, I wanted, pinioned fast,
Was powerless in the clutch to left and right
O' the rabble pouring in, rascality
Enlisted, rampant on the side of hearth
Home and the husband,—pay in prospect too!
They heaped themselves upon me. "Ha!—and him
"Also you outrage? Him, too, my sole friend,
"Guardian and saviour? That I baulk you of,
"Since—see how God can help at last and worst!"
She sprang at the sword that hung beside him, seized,
Drew, brandished it, the sunrise burned for joy
O' the blade, "Die," cried she, "devil, in God's name!"
Ah, but they all closed round her, twelve to one
—The unmanly men, no woman-mother made,
Spawned somehow! Dead-white and disarmed she lay.

No matter for the sword, her word sufficed
To spike the coward through and through: he shook,
Could only spit between the teeth—"You see?
"You hear? Bear witness, then! Write down.. but no—
"Carry these criminals to the prison-house,
"For first thing! I begin my search meanwhile
"After the stolen effects, gold, jewels, plate,
"Money and clothes, they robbed me of and fled,
"With no few amorous pieces, verse and prose,
"I have much reason to expect to find."

When I saw that—no more than the first mad speech,
Made out the speaker mad and a laughing-stock,
So neither did this next device explode
One listener's indignation,—that a scribe
Did sit down, set himself to write indeed,
While sundry knaves began to peer and pry
In corner and hole,—that Guido, wiping brow
And getting him a countenance, was fast
Losing his fear, beginning to strut free
O' the stage of his exploit, snuff here, sniff there,—
Then I took truth in, guessed sufficiently
The service for the moment. "What I say,
"Slight at your peril! We are aliens here,
"My adversary and I, called noble both;
"I am the nobler, and a name men know.

"I could refer our cause to our own Court
"In our own country, but prefer appeal
"To the nearer jurisdiction. Being a priest,
"Though in a secular garb,—for reasons good
"I shall adduce in due time to my peers,—
"I demand that the Church I serve, decide
"Between us, right the slandered lady there.
"A Tuscan noble, I might claim the Duke:
"A priest, I rather choose the Church,—bid Rome
"Cover the wronged with her inviolate shield."

There was no refusing this: they bore me off,
They bore her off, to separate cells o' the same
Ignoble prison, and, separate, thence to Rome.
Pompilia's face, then and thus, looked on me
The last time in this life: not one sight since,
Never another sight to be! And yet
I thought I had saved her. I appealed to Rome:
It seems I simply sent her to her death.
You tell me she is dying now, or dead;
I cannot bring myself to quite believe
This is a place you torture people in:
What if this your intelligence were just
A subtlety, an honest wile to work
On a man at unawares? 'T were worthy you.
No, Sirs, I cannot have the lady dead!

That erect form, flashing brow, fulgurant eye,
That voice immortal (oh, that voice of hers!)
That vision in the blood-red day-break—that
Leap to life of the pale electric sword
Angels go armed with,—that was not the last
O' the lady! Come, I see through it, you find—
Know the manœuvre! Also herself said
I had saved her: do you dare say she spoke false?
Let me see for myself if it be so!
Though she were dying, a Priest might be of use,
The more when he 's a friend too,—she called me
Far beyond "friend." Come, let me see her—indeed
It is my duty, being a priest: I hope
I stand confessed, established, proved a priest?
My punishment had motive that, a priest
I, in a laic garb, a mundane mode,
Did what were harmlessly done otherwise.
I never touched her with my finger-tip
Except to carry her to the couch, that eve,
Against my heart, beneath my head, bowed low,
As we priests carry the paten: that is why
—To get leave and go see her of your grace—
I have told you this whole story over again.
Do I deserve grace? For I might lock lips,
Laugh at your jurisdiction: what have you
To do with me in the matter? I suppose

You hardly think I donned a bravo's dress
To have a hand in the new crime ; on the old,
Judgment 's delivered, penalty imposed,
I was chained fast at Civita hand and foot—
She had only you to trust to, you and Rome,
Rome and the Church, and no pert meddling priest
Two days ago, when Guido, with the right,
Hacked her to pieces. One might well be wroth ;
I have been patient, done my best to help :
I come from Civita and punishment
As friend of the Court—and for pure friendship's sake
Have told my tale to the end,—nay, not the end—
For, wait—I'll end—not leave you that excuse !

When we were parted,—shall I go on there?
I was presently brought to Rome—yes, here I stood
Opposite yonder very crucifix—
And there sat you and you, Sirs, quite the same.
I heard charge, and bore question, and told tale
Noted down in the book there,—turn and see
If, by one jot or tittle, I vary now !
I' the colour the tale takes, there 's change perhaps ;
'T is natural, since the sky is different,
Eclipse in the air now ; still, the outline stays.
I showed you how it came to be my part
To save the lady. Then your clerk produced

Papers, a pack of stupid and impure
Banalities called letters about love—
Love, indeed,—I could teach who styled them so,
Better, I think, though priest and loveless both!
"—How was it that a wife, young, innocent,
"And stranger to your person, wrote this page?"—
"—She wrote it when the Holy Father wrote
"The bestiality that posts thro' Rome,
"Put in his mouth by Pasquin." "Nor perhaps
"Did you return these answers, verse and prose,
"Signed, sealed and sent the lady? There 's your hand!"
"—This precious piece of verse, I really judge,
"Is meant to copy my own character,
"A clumsy mimic; and this other prose,
"Not so much even; both rank forgery:
"Verse, quotha? Bembo's verse! When Saint John wrote
"The tract '*De Tribus*,' I wrote this to match."
"—How came it, then, the documents were found
"At the inn on your departure?"—"I opine,
"Because there were no documents to find
"In my presence,—you must hide before you find.
"Who forged them hardly practised in my view;
"Who found them waited till I turned my back."
"—And what of the clandestine visits paid,
"Nocturnal passage in and out the house
"With its lord absent? 'T is alleged you climbed . . ."

" —Flew on a broomstick to the man i' the moon!
" Who witnessed or will testify this trash?"
" —The trusty servant, Margherita's self,
" Even she who brought you letters, you confess,
" And, you confess, took letters in reply:
" Forget not we have knowledge of the facts!"
" —Sirs, who have knowledge of the facts, defray
" The expenditure of wit I waste in vain,
" Trying to find out just one fact of all!
" She who brought letters from who could not write,
" And took back letters to who could not read,—
" Who was that messenger, of your charity?"
" —Well, so far favours you the circumstance
" That this same messenger . . . how shall we say? . . .
" *Sub imputatione meretricis*
" *Laborat*,—which makes accusation null: .
" We waive this woman's: nought makes void the next.
" Borsi, called Venerino, he who drove,
" O' the first night when you fled away, at length
" Deposes to your kissings in the coach,
" —Frequent, frenetic . . ." " When deposed he so?"
" After some weeks of sharp imprisonment . . ."
" —Granted by friend the Governor, I engage—"
" —For his participation in your flight!
" At length his obduracy melting made

" The avowal mentioned . ." " Was dismissed forthwith
" To liberty, poor knave, for recompense.
" Sirs, give what credit to the lie you can!
" For me, no word in my defence I speak,
" And God shall argue for the lady!"
So
Did I stand question, and make answer, still
With the same result of smiling disbelief,
Polite impossibility of faith
In such affected virtue in a priest;
But a showing fair play, an indulgence, even,
To one no worse than others after all—
Who had not brought disgrace to the order, played
Discreetly, ruffled gown nor ripped the cloth
In a bungling game at romps: I have told you, Sirs—
If I pretended simply to be pure
Honest and Christian in the case,—absurd!
As well go boast myself above the needs
O' the human nature, careless how meat smells,
Wine tastes,—a saint above the smack! But once
Abate my crest, own flaws i' the flesh, agree
To go with the herd, be hog no more nor less,
Why, hogs in common herd have common rights:
I must not be unduly borne upon,
Who just romanced a little, sowed wild oats,
But 'scaped without a scandal, flagrant fault.

My name helped to a mirthful circumstance:
"Joseph" would do well to amend his plea:
Undoubtedly—some toying with the wife,
But as for ruffian violence and rape,
Potiphar pressed too much on the other side!
The intrigue, the elopement, the disguise,—well charged!
The letters and verse looked hardly like the truth.
Your apprehension was—of guilt enough
To be compatible with innocence,
So, punished best a little and not too much.
Had I struck Guido Franceschini's face,
You had counselled me withdraw for my own sake,
Baulk him of bravo-hiring. Friends came round,
Congratulated, "Nobody mistakes!
"The pettiness o' the forfeiture defines
"The peccadillo: Guido gets his share:
"His wife is free of husband and hook-nose,
"The mouldy viands and the mother-in-law.
"To Civita with you and amuse the time,
"Travesty us '*De Raptu Helenæ!*'
"A funny figure must the husband cut
"When the wife makes him skip,—too ticklish, eh?
"Do it in Latin, not the Vulgar, then!
"Scazons—we 'll copy and send his Eminence.
"Mind—one iambus in the final foot!
"He 'll rectify it, be your friend for life!"

Oh, Sirs, depend on me for much new light
Thrown on the justice and religion here
By this proceeding, much fresh food for thought!

And I was just set down to study these
In relegation, two short days ago,
Admiring how you read the rules, when, clap,
A thunder comes into my solitude—
I am caught up in a whirlwind and cast here,
Told of a sudden, in this room where so late
You dealt out law adroitly, that those scales,
I meekly bowed to, took my allotment from,
Guido has snatched at, broken in your hands,
Metes to himself the murder of his wife,
Full measure, pressed down, running over now!
Can I assist to an explanation?—Yes,
I rise in your esteem, sagacious Sirs,
Stand up a renderer of reasons, not
The officious priest would personate Saint George
For a mock Princess in undragoned days.
What, the blood startles you? What, after all
The priest who needs must carry sword on thigh
May find imperative use for it? Then, there was
A Princess, was a dragon belching flame,
And should have been a Saint George also? Then,
There might be worse schemes than to break the bonds

At Arezzo, lead her by the little hand,
Till she reached Rome, and let her try to live?
But you were law and gospel,—would one please
Stand back, allow your faculty elbow-room?
You blind guides who must needs lead eyes that see!
Fools, alike ignorant of man and God!
What was there here should have perplexed your wit
For a wink of the owl-eyes of you? How miss, then,
What 's now forced on you by this flare of fact—
As if Saint Peter failed to recognize
Nero as no apostle, John or James,
Till someone burned a martyr, made a torch
O' the blood and fat to show his features by!
Could you fail read this cartulary aright
On head and front of Franceschini there,
Large-lettered like hell's masterpiece of print,—
That he, from the beginning pricked at heart
By some lust, letch of hate against his wife,
Plotted to plague her into overt sin
And shame, would slay Pompilia body and soul,
And save his mean self—miserably caught
I' the quagmire of his own tricks, cheats and lies?
—That himself wrote those papers,—from himself
To himself,—which, i' the name of me and her,
His mistress-messenger gave her and me,
Touching us with such pustules of the soul

That she and I might take the taint, be shown
To the world and shuddered over, speckled so?
—That the agent put her sense into my words,
Made substitution of the thing she hoped,
For the thing she had and held, its opposite,
While the husband in the background bit his lips
At each fresh failure of his precious plot?
—That when at the last we did rush each on each,
By no chance but because God willed it so—
The spark of truth was struck from out our souls—
Made all of me, descried in the first glance,
Seem fair and honest and permissible love
O' the good and true—as the first glance told me
There was no duty patent in the world
Like daring try be good and true myself,
Leaving the shows of things to the Lord of Show
And Prince o' the Power of the Air. Our very flight,
Even to its most ambiguous circumstance,
Irrefragably proved how futile, false . . .
Why, men—men and not boys—boys and not babes—
Babes and not beasts—beasts and not stocks and stones!—
Had the liar's lie been true one pin-point speck,
Were I the accepted suitor, free o' the place,
Disposer of the time, to come at a call
And go at a wink as who should say me nay,—

What need of flight, what were the gain therefrom
But just damnation, failure or success?
Damnation pure and simple to her the wife
And me the priest—who bartered private bliss
For public reprobation, the safe shade
For the sunshine which men see to pelt me by:
What other advantage,—we who led the days
And nights alone i' the house,—was flight to find?
In our whole journey did we stop an hour,
Diverge a foot from straight road till we reached
Or would have reached—but for that fate of ours—
The father and mother, in the eye of Rome,
The eye of yourselves we made aware of us
At the first fall of misfortune? And indeed
You did so far give sanction to our flight,
Confirm its purpose, as lend helping hand,
Deliver up Pompilia not to him
She fled, but those the flight was ventured for.
Why then could you, who stopped short, not go on
One poor step more, and justify the means,
Having allowed the end? – not see and say
"Here 's the exceptional conduct that should claim
"To be exceptionally judged on rules
"Which, understood, make no exception here"—
Why play instead into the devil's hands
By dealing so ambiguously as gave

Guido the power to intervene like me,
Prove one exception more? I saved his wife
Against law: against law he slays her now:
Deal with him!

I have done with being judged.
I stand here guiltless in thought, word and deed,
To the point that I apprise you,—in contempt
For all misapprehending ignorance
O' the human heart, much more the mind of Christ,—
That I assuredly did bow, was blessed
By the revelation of Pompilia. There!
Such is the final fact I fling you, Sirs,
To mouth and mumble and misinterpret: there!
"The priest 's in love," have it the vulgar way!
Unpriest me, rend the rags o' the vestment, do—
Degrade deep, disenfranchise all you dare—
Remove me from the midst, no longer priest
And fit companion for the like of you—
Your gay Abati with the well-turned leg
And rose i' the hat-rim, Canons, cross at neck
And silk mask in the pocket of the gown,
Brisk Bishops with the world's musk still unbrushed
From the rochet; I 'll no more of these good things:
There 's a crack somewhere, something that 's unsound
I' the rattle!

For Pompilia—be advised,
Build churches, go pray! You will find me there,
I know, if you come,—and you will come, I know.
Why, there 's a Judge weeping! Did not I say
You were good and true at bottom? You see the truth—
I am glad I helped you: she helped me just so.

But for Count Guido,—you must counsel there!
I bow my head, bend to the very dust,
Break myself up in shame of faultiness.
I had him one whole moment, as I said—
As I remember, as will never out
O' the thoughts of me,—I had him in arm's reach
There,—as you stand, Sir, now you cease to sit,—
I could have killed him ere he killed his wife,
And did not: he went off alive and well
And then effected this last feat—through me!
Me—not through you—dismiss that fear! 'T was you
Hindered me staying here to save her,—not
From leaving you and going back to him
And doing service in Arezzo. Come,
Instruct me in procedure! I conceive—
In all due self-abasement might I speak—
How you will deal with Guido: oh, not death!
Death, if it let her life be: otherwise
Not death,—your lights will teach you clearer! I

Certainly have an instinct of my own
I' the matter: bear with me and weigh its worth!
Let us go away—leave Guido all alone
Back on the world again that knows him now!
I think he will be found (indulge so far!)
Not to die so much as slide out of life,
Pushed by the general horror and common hate
Low, lower,—left o' the very ledge of things,
I seem to see him catch convulsively
One by one at all honest forms of life,
At reason, order, decency and use—
To cramp him and get foothold by at least;
And still they disengage them from his clutch.
"What, you are he, then, had Pompilia once
"And so forwent her? Take not up with us!"
And thus I see him slowly and surely edged
Off all the table-land whence life upsprings
Aspiring to be immortality,
As the snake, hatched on hill-top by mischance,
Despite his wriggling, slips, slides, slidders down
Hill-side, lies low and prostrate on the smooth
Level of the outer place, lapsed in the vale:
So I lose Guido in the loneliness,
Silence and dusk, till at the doleful end,
At the horizontal line, creation's verge,
From what just is to absolute nothingness—

Whom is it, straining onward still, he meets?
What other man deep further in the fate,
Who, turning at the prize of a footfall
To flatter him and promise fellowship,
Discovers in the act a frightful face—
Judas, made monstrous by muoh solitude!
The two are at one now! Let them love their love
That bites and claws like hate, or hate their hate
That mops and mows and makes as it were love!
There, let them each tear each in devil's-fun,
Or fondle this the other while malice aches—
Both teach, both learn detestability!
Kiss him the kiss, Iscariot! Pay that back,
That smatch o' the slaver blistering on your lip,
By the better trick, the insult he spared Christ—
Lure him the lure o' the letters, Aretine!
Lick him o'er slimy-smooth with jelly-filth
O' the verse-and-prose pollution in love's guise!
The cockatrice is with the basilisk!
There let them grapple, denizens o' the dark,
Foes or friends, but indissolubly bound,
In their one spot out of the ken of God
Or care of man, for ever and ever more!

Why, Sirs, what 's this? Why, this is sorry and strange!
Futility, divagation: this from me

Bound to be rational, justify an act
Of sober man!—whereas, being moved so much,
I give you cause to doubt the lady's mind:
A pretty sarcasm for the world! I fear
You do her wit injustice,—all through me!
Like my fate all through,—ineffective help!
A poor rash advocate I prove myself.
You might be angry with good cause: but sure
At the advocate,—only at the undue zeal
That spoils the force of his own plea, I think?
My part was just to tell you how things stand,
State facts and not be flustered at their fume.
But then 't is a priest speaks: as for love,—no!
If you let buzz a vulgar fly like that
About your brains, as if I loved, forsooth,
Indeed, Sirs, you do wrong! We had no thought
Of such infatuation, she and I:
There are many points that prove it: do be just!
I told you,—at one little roadside-place
I spent a good half-hour, paced to and fro
The garden; just to leave her free awhile,
I plucked a handful of Spring herb and bloom:
I might have sat beside her on the bench
Where the children were: I wish the thing had been,
Indeed: the event could not be worse, you know:
One more half-hour of her saved! She 's dead now, Sirs!

While I was running on at such a rate,
Friends should have plucked me by the sleeve: I went
Too much o' the trivial outside of her face
And the purity that shone there—plain to me,
Not to you, what more natural? Nor am I
Infatuated,—oh, I saw, be sure!
Her brow had not the right line, leaned too much,
Painters would say; they like the straight-up Greek:
This seemed bent somewhat with an invisible crown
Of martyr and saint, not such as art approves.
And how the dark orbs dwelt deep underneath,
Looked out of such a sad sweet heaven on me!
The lips, compressed a little, came forward too,
Careful for a whole world of sin and pain.
That was the face, her husband makes his plea,
He sought just to disfigure,—no offence
Beyond that! Sirs, let us be rational!
He needs must vindicate his honour,—ay,
Yet shirks, the coward, in a clown's disguise,
Away from the scene, endeavours to escape.
Now, had he done so, slain and left no trace
O' the slayer,—what were vindicated, pray?
You had found his wife disfigured or a corpse,
For what and by whom? It is too palpable!
Then, here 's another point involving law:
I use this argument to show you meant

No calumny against us by that title
O' the sentence,—liars try to twist it so:
What penalty it bore, I had to pay
Till further proof should follow of innocence—
Probationis ob defectum,—proof?
How could you get proof without trying us?
You went through the preliminary form,
Stopped there, contrived this sentence to amuse
The adversary. If the title ran
For more than fault imputed and not proved,
That was a simple penman's error, else
A slip i' the phrase,—as when we say of you
"Charged with injustice"—which may either be
Or not be,—'t is a name that sticks meanwhile.
Another relevant matter: fool that I am!
Not what I wish true, yet a point friends urge:
It is not true,—yet, since friends think it helps,—
She only tried me when some others failed—
Began with Conti, whom I told you of,
And Guillichini, Guido's kinsfolk both,
And when abandoned by them, not before,
Turned to me. That 's conclusive why she turned.
Much good they got by the happy cowardice!
Conti is dead, poisoned a month ago:
Does that much strike you as a sin? Not much.
After the present murder,—one mark more

On the Moor's skin,—what is black by blacker still?
Conti had come here and told truth. And so
With Guillichini; he 's condemned of course
To the galleys, as a friend in this affair,
Tried and condemned for no one thing i' the world,
A fortnight since by who but the Governor?—
The just judge, who refused Pompilia help
At first blush, being her husband's friend, you know.
There are two tales to suit the separate courts,
Arezzo and Rome: he tells you here, we fled
Alone, unhelped,—lays stress on the main fault,
The spiritual sin, Rome looks to: but elsewhere
He likes best we should break in, steal, bear off,
Be fit to brand and pillory and flog—
That 's the charge goes to the heart of the Governor:
If these unpriest me, you and I may yet
Converse, Vincenzo Marzi-Medici!
Oh, Sirs, there are worse men than you, I say!
More easily duped, I mean; this stupid lie,
Its liar never dared propound in Rome,
He gets Arezzo to receive,—nay more,
Gets Florence and the Duke to authorize!
This is their Rota's sentence, their Granduke
Signs and seals! Rome for me henceforward—Rome,
Where better men are,—most of all, that man
The Augustinian of the Hospital,

Who writes the letter,—he confessed, he says,
Many a dying person, never one
So sweet and true and pure and beautiful.
A good man! Will you make him Pope one day?
Not that he is not good too, this we have—
But old,—else he would have his word to speak,
His truth to teach the world: I thirst for truth,
But shall not drink it till I reach the source.

Sirs, I am quiet again. You see, we are
So very pitiable, she and I,
Who had conceivably been otherwise.
Forget distemperature and idle heat!
Apart from truth's sake, what 's to move so much?
Pompilia will be presently with God;
I am, on earth, as good as out of it,
A relegated priest; when exile ends,
I mean to do my duty and live long.
She and I are mere strangers now: but priests
Should study passion; how else cure mankind,
Who come for help in passionate extremes?
I do but play with an imagined life
Of who, unfettered by a vow, unblessed
By the higher call,—since you will have it so,—
Leads it companioned by the woman there.
To live, and see her learn, and learn by her,

Out of the low obscure and petty world—
Or only see one purpose and one will
Evolve themselves i' the world, change wrong to right:
To have to do with nothing but the true,
The good, the eternal—and these, not alone
In the main current of the general life,
But small experiences of every day,
Concerns of the particular hearth and home:
To learn not only by a comet's rush
But a rose's birth,—not by the grandeur, God—
But the comfort, Christ. All this, how far away!
Mere delectation, meet for a minute's dream!—
Just as a drudging student trims his lamp,
Opens his Plutarch, puts him in the place
Of Roman, Grecian; draws the patched gown close,
Dreams, "Thus should I fight, save or rule the world!"—
Then smilingly, contentedly, awakes
To the old solitary nothingness.
So I, from such communion, pass content . . .

O great, just, good God! Miserable me!

VII.

POMPILIA.

I AM just seventeen years and five months old,
And, if I lived one day more, three full weeks;
'T is writ so in the church's register,
Lorenzo in Lucina, all my names
At length, so many names for one poor child,
—Francesca Camilla Vittoria Angela
Pompilia Comparini,—laughable!
Also 't is writ that I was married there
Four years ago: and they will add, I hope,
When they insert my death, a word or two,—
Omitting all about the mode of death,—
This, in its place, this which one cares to know,
That I had been a mother of a son
Exactly two weeks. It will be through grace
O' the Curate, not through any claim I have;
Because the boy was born at, so baptized
Close to, the Villa, in the proper church:

A pretty church, I say no word against,
Yet stranger-like,—while this Lorenzo seems
My own particular place, I always say.
I used to wonder, when I stood scarce high
As the bed here, what the marble lion meant,
With half his body rushing from the wall,
Eating the figure of a prostrate man—
(To the right, it is, of entry by the door)
An ominous sign to one baptized like me,
Married, and to be buried there, I hope.
And they should add, to have my life complete,
He is a boy and Gaetan by name—
Gaetano, for a reason,—if the friar
Don Celestine will ask this grace for me
Of Curate Ottoboni: he it was
Baptized me: he remembers my whole life
As I do his grey hair.

All these few things
I know are true,—will you remember them?
Because time flies. The surgeon cared for me,
To count my wounds,—twenty-two dagger-wounds,
Five deadly, but I do not suffer much—
Or too much pain,—and am to die to-night.

Oh how good God is that my babe was born,

—Better than born, baptized and hid away
Before this happened, safe from being hurt!
That had been sin God could not well forgive:
He was too young to smile and save himself.
When they took, two days after he was born,
My babe away from me to be baptized
And hidden awhile, for fear his foe should find,—
The country-woman, used to nursing babes,
Said "Why take on so? where is the great loss?
"These next three weeks he will but sleep and feed,
"Only begin to smile at the month's end;
"He would not know you, if you kept him here,
"Sooner than that; so, spend three merry weeks
"Snug in the Villa, getting strong and stout,
"And then I bring him back to be your own,
"And both of you may steal to—we know where!"
The month—there wants of it two weeks this day!
Still, I half fancied when I heard the knock
At the Villa in the dusk, it might prove she—
Come to say "Since he smiles before the time,
"Why should I cheat you out of one good hour?
"Back I have brought him; speak to him and judge!"
Now I shall never see him; what is worse,
When he grows up and gets to be my age,
He will seem hardly more than a great boy;
And if he asks "What was my mother like?"

People may answer "Like girls of seventeen"—
And how can he but think of this and that,
Lucias, Marias, Sofias, who titter or blush
When he regards them as such boys may do?
Therefore I wish someone will please to say
I looked already old though I was young;
Do I not . . . say, if you are by to speak . . .
Look nearer twenty? No more like, at least,
Girls who look arch or redden when boys laugh,
Than the poor Virgin that I used to know
At our street-corner in a lonely niche,—
The babe, that sat upon her knees, broke off,—
Thin white glazed clay, you pitied her the more:
She, not the gay ones, always got my rose.

How happy those are who know how to write!
Such could write what their son should read in time,
Had they a whole day to live out like me.
Also my name is not a common name,
"Pompilia," and may help to keep apart
A little the thing I am from what girls are.
But then how far away, how hard to find
Will anything about me have become,
Even if the boy bethink himself and ask!
No father that he ever knew at all,
Nor ever had—no, never had, I say!

That is the truth,—nor any mother left,
Out of the little two weeks that she lived,
Fit for such memory as might assist:
As good too as no family, no name,
Not even poor old Pietro's name, nor hers,
Poor kind unwise Violante, since it seems
They must not be my parents any more.
That is why something put it in my head
To call the boy "Gaetano"—no old name
For sorrow's sake; I looked up to the sky
And took a new saint to begin anew.
One who has only been made saint—how long?
Twenty-five years: so, carefuller, perhaps,
To guard a namesake than those old saints grow,
Tired out by this time,—see my own five saints!

On second thoughts, I hope he will regard
The history of me as what someone dreamed,
And get to disbelieve it at the last:
Since to myself it dwindles fast to that,
Sheer dreaming and impossibility,—
Just in four days too! All the seventeen years,
Not once did a suspicion visit me
How very different a lot is mine
From any other woman's in the world.
The reason must be, 't was by step and step

It got to grow so terrible and strange.
These strange woes stole on tiptoe, as it were,
Into my neighbourhood and privacy,
Sat down where I sat, laid them where I lay;
And I was found familiarised with fear,
When friends broke in, held up a torch and cried
"Why, you Pompilia in the cavern thus,
"How comes that arm of yours about a wolf?
"And the soft length,—lies in and out your feet
"And laps you round the knee,—a snake it is!"
And so on.

Well, and they are right enough,
By the torch they hold up now: for first, observe,
I never had a father,—no, nor yet
A mother: my own boy can say at least
"I had a mother whom I kept two weeks!"
Not I, who little used to doubt . . . *I* doubt
Good Pietro, kind Violante, gave me birth?
They loved me always as I love my babe
(—Nearly so, that is—quite so could not be—)
Did for me all I meant to do for him,
Till one surprising day, three years ago,
They both declared, at Rome, before some judge
In some Court where the people flocked to hear,
That really I had never been their child,

Was a mere castaway, the careless crime
Of an unknown man, the crime and care too much
Of a woman known too well,—little to these,
Therefore, of whom I was the flesh and blood:
What then to Pietro and Violante, both
No more my relatives than you or you?
Nothing to them! You know what they declared.

So with my husband,—just such a surprise,
Such a mistake, in that relationship!
Everyone says that husbands love their wives,
Guard them and guide them, give them happiness;
'T is duty, law, pleasure, religion: well,
You see how much of this comes true in mine!
People indeed would fain have somehow proved
He was no husband: but he did not hear,
Or would not wait, and so has killed us all.
Then there is . . . only let me name one more!
There is the friend,—men will not ask about,
But tell untruths of, and give nicknames to,
And think my lover, most surprise of all!
Do only hear, it is the priest they mean,
Giuseppe Caponsacchi: a priest—love,
And love me! Well, yet people think he did.
I am married, he has taken priestly vows,
They know that, and yet go on, say, the same,

"Yes, how he loves you!" "That was love"—they say,
When anything is answered that they ask:
Or else "No wonder you love him"—they say.
Then they shake heads, pity much, scarcely blame—
As if we neither of us lacked excuse,
And anyhow are punished to the full,
And downright love atones for everything!
Nay, I heard read out in the public Court
Before the judge, in presence of my friends,
Letters 't was said the priest had sent to me,
And other letters sent him by myself,
We being lovers!

Listen what this is like!
When I was a mere child, my mother . . . that 's
Violante, you must let me call her so
Nor waste time, trying to unlearn the word . . .
She brought a neighbour's child of my own age
To play with me of rainy afternoons;
And, since there hung a tapestry on the wall,
We two agreed to find each other out
Among the figures. "Tisbe, that is you,
"With half-moon on your hair-knot, spear in hand,
"Flying, but no wings, only the great scarf
"Blown to a bluish rainbow at your back:
"Call off your hound and leave the stag alone!"
"—And there are you, Pompilia, such green leaves

"Flourishing out of your five finger-ends,
"And all the rest of you so brown and rough:
"Why is it you are turned a sort of tree?"
You know the figures never were ourselves
Though we nicknamed them so. Thus, all my life,—
As well what was, as what, like this, was not,—
Looks old, fantastic and impossible:
I touch a fairy thing that fades and fades.
—Even to my babe! I thought, when he was born,
Something began for once that would not end,
Nor change into a laugh at me, but stay
For evermore, eternally quite mine.
Well, so he is,—but yet they bore him off,
The third day, lest my husband should lay traps
And catch him, and by means of him catch me.
Since they have saved him so, it was well done:
Yet thence comes such confusion of what was
With what will be,—that late seems long ago,
And, what years should bring round, already come,
Till even he withdraws into a dream
As the rest do: I fancy him grown great,
Strong, stern, a tall young man who tutors me,
Frowns with the others "Poor imprudent child!
"Why did you venture out of the safe street?
"Why go so far from help to that lone house?
"Why open at the whisper and the knock?"

Six days ago when it was New Year's-day,
We bent above the fire and talked of him,
What he should do when he was grown and great.
Violante, Pietro, each had given the arm
I leant on, to walk by, from couch to chair
And fireside,—laughed, as I lay safe at last,
"Pompilia's march from bed to board is made,
"Pompilia back again and with a babe,
"Shall one day lend his arm and help her walk!"
Then we all wished each other more New Years.
Pietro began to scheme—"Our cause is gained;
"The law is stronger than a wicked man:
"Let him henceforth go his way, leave us ours!
"We will avoid the city, tempt no more
"The greedy ones by feasting and parade,—
"Live at the other villa, we know where,
"Still farther off, and we can watch the babe
"Grow fast in the good air; and wood is cheap
"And wine sincere outside the city gate.
"I still have two or three old friends will grope
"Their way along the mere half-mile of road,
"With staff and lantern on a moonless night
"When one needs talk: they'll find me, never fear,
"And I'll find them a flask of the old sort yet!"
Violante said "You chatter like a crow:
"Pompilia tires o' the tattle, and shall to bed:

"Do not too much the first day,—somewhat more
"To-morrow, and, the next, begin the cape
"And hood and coat! I have spun wool enough."
Oh what a happy friendly eve was that!

And, next day, about noon, out Pietro went—
He was so happy and would talk so much,
Until Violante pushed and laughed him forth
Sight-seeing in the cold,—"So much to see
"I' the churches! Swathe your throat three times!"
she cried,
"And, above all, beware the slippery ways,
"And bring us all the news by supper-time!"
He came back late, laid by cloak, staff and hat,
Powdered so thick with snow it made us laugh,
Rolled a great log upon the ash o' the hearth,
And bade Violante treat us to a flask,
Because he had obeyed her faithfully,
Gone sight-see through the seven, and found no church
To his mind like San Giovanni—"There 's the fold,
"And all the sheep together, big as cats!
"And such a shepherd, half the size of life,
"Starts up and hears the angel"—when, at the door,
A tap: we started up: you know the rest.

Pietro at least had done no harm, I know;

Nor even Violante, so much harm as makes
Such revenge lawful. Certainly she erred—
Did wrong, how shall I dare say otherwise?—
In telling that first falsehood, buying me
From my poor faulty mother at a price,
To pass off upon Pietro as his child.
If one should take my babe, give him a name.
Say he was not Gaetano and my own,
But that some other woman made his mouth
And hands and feet,—how very false were that!
No good could come of that; and all harm did.
Yet if a stranger were to represent
"Needs must you either give your babe to me
"And let me call him mine for evermore,
"Or let your husband get him"—ah, my God,
That were a trial I refuse to face!
Well, just so here: it proved wrong but seemed right
To poor Violante—for there lay, she said,
My poor real dying mother in her rags,
Who put me from her with the life and all,
Poverty, pain, shame and disease at once,
To die the easier by what price I fetched—
Also (I hope) because I should be spared
Sorrow and sin,—why may not that have helped?
My father,—he was no one, any one,—
The worse, the likelier,—call him—he who came,

Was wicked for his pleasure, went his way,
And left no trace to track by; there remained
Nothing but me, the unnecessary life,
To catch up or let fall,—and yet a thing
She could make happy, be made happy with,
This poor Violante,—who would frown thereat?

Well, God, you see! God plants us where we grow.
It is not that because a bud is born
At a wild briar's end, full i' the wild beast's way,
We ought to pluck and put it out of reach
On the oak-tree top,—say "There the bud belongs!"
She thought, moreover, real lies were lies told
For harm's sake; whereas this had good at heart,
Good for my mother, good for me, and good
For Pietro who was meant to love a babe,
And needed one to make his life of use,
Receive his house and land when he should die.
Wrong, wrong and always wrong! how plainly wrong!
For see, this fault kept pricking, as faults do,
All the same at her heart: this falsehood hatched,
She could not let it go nor keep it fast.
She told me so,—the first time I was found
Locked in her arms once more after the pain,
When the nuns let me leave them and go home,
And both of us cried all the cares away,—

This it was set her on to make amends,
This brought about the marriage—simply this!
Do let me speak for her you blame so much!
When Paul, my husband's brother, found me out,
Heard there was wealth for who should marry me,
So, came and made a speech to ask my hand
For Guido,—she, instead of piercing straight
Through the pretence to the ignoble truth,
Fancied she saw God's very finger point,
Designate just the time for planting me
(The wild-briar slip she plucked to love and wear)
In soil where I could strike real root, and grow,
And get to be the thing I called myself:
For, wife and husband are one flesh, God says,
And I, whose parents seemed such and were none,
Should in a husband have a husband now,
Find nothing, this time, but was what it seemed,
—All truth and no confusion any more.
I know she meant all good to me, all pain
To herself,—since how could it be aught but pain
To give me up, so, from her very breast,
The wilding flower-tree-branch that, all those years,
She had got used to feel for and find fixed?
She meant well: has it been so ill i' the main?
That is but fair to ask: one cannot judge
Of what has been the ill or well of life,

The day that one is dying,—sorrows change
Into not altogether sorrow-like;
I do see strangeness but scarce misery,
Now it is over, and no danger more.
My child is safe; there seems not so much pain.
It comes, most like, that I am just absolved,
Purged of the past, the foul in me, washed fair,—
One cannot both have and not have, you know,—
Being right now, I am happy and colour things.
Yes, everybody that leaves life sees all
Softened and bettered: so with other sights:
To me at least was never evening yet
But seemed far beautifuller than its day,
For past is past.

There was a fancy came,
When somewhere, in the journey with my friend,
We stepped into a hovel to get food;
And there began a yelp here, a bark there,—
Misunderstanding creatures that were wroth
And vexed themselves and us till we retired.
The hovel is life: no matter what dogs bit
Or cats scratched in the hovel I break from,
All outside is lone field, moon and such peace—
Flowing in, filling up as with a sea
Whereon comes Someone, walks fast on the white,

Jesus Christ's self, Don Celestine declares,
To meet me and calm all things back again.

Beside, up to my marriage, thirteen years
Were, each day, happy as the day was long:
This may have made the change too terrible.
I know that when Violante told me first
The cavalier—she meant to bring next morn,
Whom I must also let take, kiss my hand—
Would be at San Lorenzo the same eve
And marry me,—which over, we should go
Home both of us without him as before,
And, till she bade speak, I must hold my tongue,
Such being the correct way with girl-brides,
From whom one word would make a father blush,—
I know, I say, that when she told me this,
—Well, I no more saw sense in what she said
Than a lamb does in people clipping wool;
Only lay down and let myself be clipped.
And when next day the cavalier who came—
(Tisbe had told me that the slim young man
With wings at head, and wings at feet, and sword
Threatening a monster, in our tapestry,
Would eat a girl else,—was a cavalier)
When he proved Guido Franceschini,—old
And nothing like so tall as I myself,

Hook-nosed and yellow in a bush of beard,
Much like a thing I saw on a boy's wrist,
He called an owl and used for catching birds,—
And when he took my hand and made a smile—
Why, the uncomfortableness of it all
Seemed hardly more important in the case
Than,—when one gives you, say, a coin to spend,—
Its newness or its oldness; if the piece
Weigh properly and buy you what you wish,
No matter whether you get grime or glare!
Men take the coin, return you grapes and figs.
Here, marriage was the coin, a dirty piece
Would purchase me the praise of those I loved:
About what else should I concern myself?

So, hardly knowing what a husband meant,
I supposed this or any man would serve,
No whit the worse for being so uncouth:
For I was ill once and a doctor came
With a great ugly hat, no plume thereto,
Black jerkin and black buckles and black sword,
And white sharp beard over the ruff in front,
And oh so lean, so sour-faced and austere!—
Who felt my pulse, made me put out my tongue,
Then oped a phial, dripped a drop or two
Of a black bitter something,—I was cured!

What mattered the fierce beard or the grim face?
It was the physic beautified the man,
Master Malpichi,—never met his match
In Rome, they said,—so ugly all the same!

However, I was hurried through a storm,
Next dark eve of December's deadest day—
How it rained!—through our street and the Lion's-mouth
And the bit of Corso,—cloaked round, covered close,
I was like something strange or contraband,—
Into blank San Lorenzo, up the aisle,
My mother keeping hold of me so tight,
I fancied we were come to see a corpse
Before the altar which she pulled me toward.
There we found waiting an unpleasant priest
Who proved the brother, not our parish friend,
But one with mischief-making mouth and eye,
Paul, whom I know since to my cost. And then
I heard the heavy church-door lock out help
Behind us: for the customary warmth,
Two tapers shivered on the altar. "Quick—
"Lose no time!" cried the priest. And straightway down
From . . . what 's behind the altar where he hid—
Hawk-nose and yellowness and bush and all,
Stepped Guido, caught my hand, and there was I
O' the chancel, and the priest had opened book,

Read here and there, made me say that and this,
And after, told me I was now a wife,
Honoured indeed, since Christ thus weds the Church,
And therefore turned he water into wine,
To show I should obey my spouse like Christ.
Then the two slipped aside and talked apart,
And I, silent and scared, got down again
And joined my mother who was weeping now.
Nobody seemed to mind us any more,
And both of us on tiptoe found our way
To the door which was unlocked by this, and wide.
When we were in the street, the rain had stopped,
All things looked better. At our own house-door,
Violante whispered "No one syllable
"To Pietro! Girl-brides never breathe a word!"
"—Well treated to a wetting, draggle-tails!"
Laughed Pietro as he opened—"Very near
"You made me brave the gutter's roaring sea
"To carry off from roost old dove and young,
"Trussed up in church, the cote, by me, the kite!
"What do these priests mean, praying folk to death
"On stormy afternoons, with Christmas close
"To wash our sins off nor require the rain?"
Violante gave my hand a timely squeeze,
Madonna saved me from immodest speech,
I kissed him and was quiet, being a bride.

When I saw nothing more, the next three weeks,
Of Guido—"Nor the Church sees Christ" thought I:
"Nothing is changed however, wine is wine
"And water only water in our house.
"Nor did I see that ugly doctor since
"That cure of the illness: just as I was cured,
"I am married,—neither scarecrow will return."

Three weeks, I chuckled—"How would Giulia stare,
"And Tecla smile and Tisbe laugh outright,
"Were it not impudent for brides to talk!"—
Until one morning, as I sat and sang
At the broidery-frame alone i' the chamber,—loud
Voices, two, three together, sobbings too,
And my name, "Guido," "Paolo," flung like stones
From each to the other! In I ran to see.
There stood the very Guido and the priest
With sly face,—formal but nowise afraid,—
While Pietro seemed all red and angry, scarce
Able to stutter out his wrath in words;
And this it was that made my mother sob,
As he reproached her—"You have murdered us,
"Me and yourself and this our child beside!"
Then Guido interposed "Murdered or not,
"Be it enough your child is now my wife!
"I claim and come to take her." Paul put in,

"Consider—kinsman, dare I term you so?—
"What is the good of your sagacity
"Except to counsel in a strait like this?
"I guarantee the parties man and wife
"Whether you like or loathe it, bless or ban.
"May spilt milk be put back within the bowl—
"The done thing, undone? You, it is, we look
"For counsel to, you fitliest will advise!
"Since milk, though spilt and spoilt, does marble good,
"Better we down on knees and scrub the floor,
"Than sigh, 'the waste would make a syllabub!'
"Help us so turn disaster to account,
"So predispose the groom, he needs shall grace
"The bride with favour from the very first,
"Not begin marriage an embittered man!"
He smiled,—the game so wholly in his hands!
While fast and faster sobbed Violante—"Ay,
"All of us murdered, past averting now!
"O my sin, O my secret!" and such like.

Then I began to half surmise the truth;
Something had happened, low, mean, underhand,
False, and my mother was to blame, and I
To pity, whom all spoke of, none addressed:
I was the chattel that had caused a crime.

I stood mute,—those who tangled must untie
The embroilment. Pietro cried "Withdraw, my child!
"She is not helpful to the sacrifice
"At this stage,—do you want the victim by
"While you discuss the value of her blood?
"For her sake, I consent to hear you talk:
"Go, child, and pray God help the innocent!

I did go and was praying God, when came
Violante, with eyes swollen and red enough,
But movement on her mouth for make-believe
Matters were somehow getting right again.
She bade me sit down by her side and hear.
"You are too young and cannot understand,
"Nor did your father understand at first.
"I wished to benefit all three of us,
"And when he failed to take my meaning,—why,
"I tried to have my way at unaware—
"Obtained him the advantage he refused.
"As if I put before him wholesome food
"Instead of broken victual,—he finds change
"I' the viands, never cares to reason why,
"But falls to blaming me, would fling the plate
"From window, scandalize the neighbourhood,
"Even while he smacks his lips,—men's way, my child!
"But either you have prayed him unperverse

"Or I have talked him back into his wits:
"And Paolo was a help in time of need,—
"Guido, not much—my child, the way of men!
"A priest is more a woman than a man,
"And Paul did wonders to persuade. In short,
"Yes, he was wrong, your father sees and says;
"My scheme was worth attempting: and bears fruit,
"Gives you a husband and a noble name,
"A palace and no end of pleasant things.
"What do you care about a handsome youth?
"They are so volatile, and tease their wives!
"This is the kind of man to keep the house.
"We lose no daughter,—gain a son, that's all:
"For 't is arranged we never separate,
"Nor miss, in our grey time of life, the tints
"Of you that colour eve to match with morn.
"In good or ill, we share and share alike,
"And cast our lots into a common lap,
"And all three die together as we lived!
"Only, at Arezzo,—that 's a Tuscan town,
"Not so large as this noisy Rome, no doubt,
"But older far and finer much, say folk,—
"In a great palace where you will be queen,
"Know the Archbishop and the Governor,
"And we see homage done you ere we die.
"Therefore, be good and pardon!"—"Pardon what?

"You know things, I am very ignorant:
"All is right if you only will not cry!"

And so an end! Because a blank begins
From when, at the word, she kissed me hard and hot,
And took me back to where my father leaned
Opposite Guido—who stood eyeing him,
As eyes the butcher the cast panting ox
That feels his fate is come, nor struggles more,—
While Paul looked archly on, pricked brow at whiles
With the pen-point as to punish triumph there,—
And said "Count Guido, take your lawful wife
"Until death part you!"

All since is one blank,
Over and ended; a terrific dream.
It is the good of dreams—so soon they go!
Wake in a horror of heart-beats, you may—
Cry "The dread thing will never from my thoughts!"
Still, a few daylight doses of plain life,
Cock-crow and sparrow-chirp, or bleat and bell
Of goats that trot by, tinkling, to be milked;
And when you rub your eyes awake and wide,
Where is the harm o' the horror? Gone! So here.
I know I wake,—but from what? Blank, I say!
This is the note of evil: for good lasts.

Even when Don Celestine bade "Search and find!
"For your soul's sake, remember what is past,
"The better to forgive it,"—all in vain!
What was fast getting indistinct before,
Vanished outright. By special grace perhaps,
Between that first calm and this last, four years
Vanish,—one quarter of my life, you know.
I am held up, amid the nothingness,
By one or two truths only—thence I hang,
And there I live,—the rest is death or dream,
All but those points of my support. I think
Of what I saw at Rome once in the Square
O' the Spaniards, opposite the Spanish House:
There was a foreigner had trained a goat,
A shuddering white woman of a beast,
To climb up, stand straight on a pile of sticks
Put close, which gave the creature room enough:
When she was settled there he, one by one,
Took away all the sticks, left just the four
Whereon the little hoofs did really rest,
There she kept firm, all underneath was air.
So, what I hold by, are my prayer to God,
My hope, that came in answer to the prayer,
Some hand would interpose and save me--hand
Which proved to be my friend's hand: and,—blest
bliss,—

That fancy which began so faint at first,
That thrill of dawn's suffusion through my dark,
Which I perceive was promise of my child,
The light his unborn face sent long before,—
God's way of breaking the good news to flesh.
That is all left now of those four bad years.
Don Celestine urged "But remember more!
"Other men's faults may help me find your own.
"I need the cruelty exposed, explained,
"Or how can I advise you to forgive?"
He thought I could not properly forgive
Unless I ceased forgetting,—which is true:
For, bringing back reluctantly to mind
My husband's treatment of me,—by a light
That 's later than my life-time, I review
And comprehend much and imagine more,
And have but little to forgive at last.
For now,—be fair and say,—is it not true
He was ill-used and cheated of his hope
To get enriched by marriage? Marriage gave
Me and no money, broke the compact so:
He had a right to ask me on those terms,
As Pietro and Violante to declare
They would not give me: so the bargain stood:
They broke it, and he felt himself aggrieved,
Became unkind with me to punish them.

They said 't was he began deception first,
Nor, in one point whereto he pledged himself,
Kept promise: what of that, suppose it were?
Echoes die off, scarcely reverberate
For ever,—why should ill keep echoing ill
And never let our ears have done with noise?
Then my poor parents took the violent way
To thwart him,—he must needs retaliate,—wrong,
Wrong, and all wrong,—better say, all blind!
As I myself was, that is sure, who else
Had understood the mystery: for his wife
Was bound in some sort to help somehow there.
It seems as if I might have interposed,
Blunted the edge of their resentment so,
Since he vexed me because they first vexed him;
"I will entreat them to desist, submit,
"Give him the money and be poor in peace,—
"Certainly not go tell the world: perhaps
"He will grow quiet with his gains."

Yes, say
Something to this effect and you do well!
But then you have to see first: I was blind.
That is the fruit of all such wormy ways,
The indirect, the unapproved of God:
You cannot find their author's end and aim,

Not even to substitute your good for bad,
Your straight for the irregular; you stand
Stupefied, profitless, as cow or sheep
That miss a man's mind, anger him just twice
By trial at repairing the first fault.
Thus, when he blamed me, "You are a coquette,
"A lure-owl posturing to attract birds,
"You look love-lures at theatre and church,
"In walk, at window!"—that, I knew, was false:
But why he charged me falsely, whither sought
To drive me by such charge,—how could I know?
So, unaware, I only made things worse.
I tried to soothe him by abjuring walk,
Window, church, theatre, for good and all,
As if he had been in earnest: that, you know,
Was nothing like the object of his charge.
Yes, when I got my maid to supplicate
The priest, whose name she read when she would read
Those feigned false letters I was forced to hear
Though I could read no word of,—he should cease
Writing,—nay, if he minded prayer of mine,
Cease from so much as even pass the street
Whereon our house looked,—in my ignorance
I was just thwarting Guido's true intent;
Which was, to bring about a wicked change
Of sport to earnest, tempt a thoughtless man

To write indeed, and pass the house, and more,
Till both of us were taken in a crime.
He ought not to have wished me thus act lies,
Simulate folly: but,—wrong or right, the wish,—
I failed to apprehend its drift. How plain
It follows,—if I fell into such fault,
He also may have overreached the mark,
Made mistake, by perversity of brain,
I' the whole sad strange plot, the grotesque intrigue
To make me and my friend unself ourselves,
Be other man and woman than we were!
Think it out, you who have the time! for me,—
I cannot say less; more I will not say.
Leave it to God to cover and undo!
Only, my dulness should not prove too much!
—Not prove that in a certain other point
Wherein my husband blamed me,—and you blame,
If I interpret smiles and shakes of head,—
I was dull too. Oh, if I dared but speak!
Must I speak? I am blamed that I forwent
A way to make my husband's favour come.
That is true: I was firm, withstood, refused . . .
—Women as you are, how can I find the words?

I felt there was just one thing Guido claimed
I had no right to give nor he to take;

We being in estrangement, soul from soul:
Till, when I sought help, the Archbishop smiled,
Inquiring into privacies of life,
—Said I was blameable—(he stands for God)
Nowise entitled to exemption there.
Then I obeyed,—as surely had obeyed
Were the injunction "Since your husband bids,
"Swallow the burning coal he proffers you!"
But I did wrong, and he gave wrong advice
Though he were thrice Archbishop,—that, I know!—
Now I have got to die and see things clear.
Remember I was barely twelve years old—
A child at marriage: I was let alone
For weeks, I told you, lived my child-life still
Even at Arezzo, when I woke and found
First . . . but I need not think of that again—
Over and ended! Try and take the sense
Of what I signify, if it must be so.
After the first, my husband, for hate's sake,
Said one eve, when the simpler cruelty
Seemed somewhat dull at edge and fit to bear,
"We have been man and wife six months almost:
"How long is this your comedy to last?
"Go this night to my chamber, not your own!"
At which word, I did rush—most true the charge—
And gain the Archbishop's house—he stands for God—

And fall upon my knees and clasp his feet,
Praying him hinder what my estranged soul
Refused to bear, though patient of the rest:
"Place me within a convent," I implored—
"Let me henceforward lead the virgin life
"You praise in Her you bid me imitate!"
What did he answer? "Folly of ignorance!
"Know, daughter, circumstances make or mar
"Virginity,—'t is virtue or 't is vice.
"That which was glory in the Mother of God
"Had been, for instance, damnable in Eve
"Created to be mother of mankind.
"Had Eve, in answer to her Maker's speech
"'Be fruitful, multiply, replenish earth'—
"Pouted 'But I choose rather to remain
"'Single'—why, she had spared herself forthwith
"Further probation by the apple and snake,
"Been pushed straight out of Paradise! For see—
"If motherhood be qualified impure,
"I catch you making God command Eve sin!
"—A blasphemy so like these Molinists',
"I must suspect you dip into their books."
Then he pursued "'T was in your covenant!"

No! There my husband never used deceit.
He never did by speech nor act imply

"Because of our souls' yearning that we meet
"And mix in soul through flesh, which yours and mine
"Wear and impress, and make their visible selves,
"—All which means, for the love of you and me,
"Let us become one flesh, being one soul!"
He only stipulated for the wealth;
Honest so far. But when he spoke as plain—
Dreadfully honest also—"Since our souls
"Stand each from each, a whole world's width between,
"Give me the fleshly vesture I can reach
"And rend and leave just fit for hell to burn!"—
Why, in God's name, for Guido's soul's own sake
Imperilled by polluting mine,—I say,
I did resist; would I had overcome!

My heart died out at the Archbishop's smile;
—It seemed so stale and worn a way o' the world,
As though 't were nature frowning—"Here is Spring,
"The sun shines as he shone at Adam's fall,
"The earth requires that warmth reach everywhere:
"What, must your patch of snow be saved forsooth
"Because you rather fancy snow than flowers?"
Something in this style he began with me.
Last he said, savagely for a good man,
"This explains why you call your husband harsh,
"Harsh to you, harsh to whom you love. God's Bread!

"The poor Count has to manage a mere child
"Whose parents leave untaught the simplest things
"Their duty was and privilege to teach,—
"Goodwives' instruction, gossips' lore: they laugh
"And leave the Count the task,—or leave it me!"
Then I resolved to tell a frightful thing.
"I am not ignorant,—know what I say,
"Declaring this is sought for hate, not love.
"Sir, you may hear things like almighty God.
"I tell you that my housemate, yes—the priest
"My husband's brother, Canon Girolamo—
"Has taught me what depraved and misnamed love
"Means, and what outward signs denote the sin,
"For he solicits me and says he loves,
"The idle young priest with nought else to do.
"My husband sees this, knows this, and lets be.
"Is it your counsel I bear this beside?"
"—More scandal, and against a priest this time!
"What, 't is the Canon now?"—less snappishly—
"Rise up, my child, for such a child you are,
"The rod were too advanced a punishment!
"Let 's try the honeyed cake. A parable!
"'Without a parable spake He not to them.'
"There was a ripe round long black toothsome fruit,
"Even a flower-fig, the prime boast of May:
"And, to the tree, said . . . either the spirit o' the fig,

"Or, if we bring in men, the gardener,
"Archbishop of the orchard—had I time
"To try o' the two which fits in best: indeed
"It might be the Creator's self, but then
"The tree should bear an apple, I suppose,—
"Well, anyhow, one with authority said
"'Ripe fig, burst skin, regale the fig-pecker—
"'The bird whereof thou art a perquisite!'
"'Nay,' with a flounce, replied the restif fig,
"'I much prefer to keep my pulp myself:
"'He may go breakfastless and dinnerless,
"'Supperless of one crimson seed, for me!'
"So, back she flopped into her bunch of leaves.
"He flew off, left her,—did the natural lord,—
"And lo, three hundred thousand bees and wasps
"Found her out, feasted on her to the shuck:
"Such gain the fig's that gave its bird no bite!
"The moral,—fools elude their proper lot,
"Tempt other fools, get ruined all alike.
"Therefore go home, embrace your husband quick!
"Which if his Canon brother chance to see,
"He will the sooner back to book again."

So, home I did go; so, the worst befell:
So, I had proof the Archbishop was just man,
And hardly that, and certainly no more.

For, miserable consequence to me,
My husband's hatred waxed nor waned at all,
His brother's boldness grew effrontery soon,
And my last stay and comfort in myself
Was forced from me: henceforth I looked to God
Only, nor cared my desecrated soul
Should have fair walls, gay windows for the world.
God's glimmer, that came through the ruin-top,
Was witness why all lights were quenched inside:
Henceforth I asked God counsel, not mankind.

So, when I made the effort, freed myself,
They said—"No care to save appearance here!
"How cynic,—when, how wanton, were enough!"
—Adding, it all came of my mother's life—
My own real mother, whom I never knew,
Who did wrong (if she needs must have done wrong)
Through being all her life, not my four years,
At mercy of the hateful: every beast
O' the field was wont to break that fountain-fence,
Trample the silver into mud so murk
Heaven could not find itself reflected there.
Now they cry "Out on her, who, plashy pool,
"Bequeathed turbidity and bitterness
"To the daughter-stream where Guido dipt and drank!"

Well, since she had to bear this brand—let me!
The rather do I understand her now,
From my experience of what hate calls love,—
Much love might be in what their love called hate.
If she sold . . . what they call, sold . . . me her child—
I shall believe she hoped in her poor heart
That I at least might try be good and pure,
Begin to live untempted, not go doomed
And done with ere once found in fault, as she.
Oh and, my mother, it all came to this?
Why should I trust those that speak ill of you,
When I mistrust who speaks even well of them?
Why, since all bound to do me good, did harm,
May not you, seeming as you harmed me most,
Have meant to do most good—and feed your child
From bramble-bush, whom not one orchard-tree
But drew bough back from, nor let one fruit fall?
This it was for you sacrificed your babe?
Gained just this, giving your heart's hope away
As I might give mine, loving it as you,
If . . . but that never could be asked of me!

There, enough! I have my support again,
Again the knowledge that my babe was, is,
Will be mine only. Him, by death, I give
Outright to God, without a further care,—

But not to any parent in the world,—
So to be safe: why is it we repine?
What guardianship were safer could we choose?
All human plans and projects come to nought:
My life, and what I know of other lives,
Prove that: no plan nor project! God shall care!

And now you are not tired? How patient then
All of you,—Oh yes, patient this long while
Listening, and understanding, I am sure!
Four days ago, when I was sound and well
And like to live, no one would understand.
People were kind, but smiled "And what of him,
"Your friend, whose tonsure the rich dark-brown hides?
"There, there!—your lover, do we dream he was?
"A priest too—never were such naughtiness!
"Still, he thinks many a long think, never fear,
"After the shy pale lady,—lay so light
"For a moment in his arms, the lucky one!"
And so on: wherefore should I blame you much?
So we are made, such difference in minds,
Such difference too in eyes that see the minds!
That man, you misinterpret and misprise—
The glory of his nature, I had thought,
Shot itself out in white light, blazed the truth
Through every atom of his act with me:

Yet where I point you, through the crystal shrine,
Purity in quintessence, one dew-drop,
You all descry a spider in the midst.
One says "The head of it is plain to see,"
And one, "They are the feet by which I judge,"
All say, "Those films were spun by nothing else."

Then, I must lay my babe away with God,
Nor think of him again, for gratitude.
Yes, my last breath shall wholly spend itself
In one attempt more to disperse the stain,
The mist from other breath fond mouths have made,
About a lustrous and pellucid soul:
So that, when I am gone but sorrow stays,
And people need assurance in their doubt
If God yet have a servant, man a friend,
The weak a saviour and the vile a foe,—
Let him be present, by the name invoked,
Giuseppe-Maria Caponsacchi!

There,
Strength comes already with the utterance!
I will remember once more for his sake
The sorrow: for he lives and is belied.
Could he be here, how he would speak for me!

I had been miserable three drear years
In that dread palace and lay passive now,
When I first learned there could be such a man.
Thus it fell: I was at a public play,
In the last days of Carnival last March,
Brought there I knew not why, but now know well.
My husband put me where I sat, in front;
Then crouched down, breathed cold through me from behind,
Stationed i' the shadow,—none in front could see,—
I, it was, faced the stranger-throng beneath,
The crowd with upturned faces, eyes one stare,
Voices one buzz. I looked but to the stage,
Whereon two lovers sang and interchanged
"True life is only love, love only bliss:
"I love thee—thee I love!" then they embraced.
I looked thence to the ceiling and the walls,—
Over the crowd, those voices and those eyes,—
My thoughts went through the roof and out, to Rome
On wings of music, waft of measured words,—
Set me down there, a happy child again
Sure that to-morrow would be festa-day,
Hearing my parents praise past festas more,
And seeing they were old if I was young,
Yet wondering why they still would end discourse
With "We must soon go, you abide your time,

"And,—might we haply see the proper friend
"Throw his arm over you and make you safe!"

Sudden I saw him; into my lap there fell
A foolish twist of comfits, broke my dream
And brought me from the air and laid me low,
As ruined as the soaring bee that 's reached
(So Pietro told me at the Villa once)
By the dust-handful. There the comfits lay:
I looked to see who flung them, and I faced
This Caponsacchi, looking up in turn.
Ere I could reason out why, I felt sure,
Whoever flung them, his was not the hand,—
Up rose the round face and good-natured grin
Of one who, in effect, had played the prank,
From covert close beside the earnest face,—
Fat waggish Conti, friend of all the world.
He was my husband's cousin, privileged
To throw the thing: the other, silent, grave,
Solemn almost, saw me, as I saw him.

There is a psalm Don Celestine recites,
"Had I a dove's wings, how I fain would flee!"
The psalm runs not "I hope, I pray for wings,"—
Not "If wings fall from heaven, I fix them fast,"—
Simply "How good it were to fly and rest,

"Have hope now, and one day expect content!
"How well to do what I shall never do!"
So I said "Had there been a man like that,
"To lift me with his strength out of all strife
"Into the calm, how I could fly and rest!
"I have a keeper in the garden here
"Whose sole employment is to strike me low
"If ever I, for solace, seek the sun.
"Life means with me successful feigning death,
"Lying stone-like, eluding notice so,
"Forgoing here the turf and there the sky.
"Suppose that man had been instead of this!"

Presently Conti laughed into my ear,
—Had tripped up to the raised place where I sat—
"Cousin, I flung them brutishly and hard!
"Because you must be hurt, to look austere
"As Caponsacchi yonder, my tall friend
"A-gazing now. Ah, Guido, you so close?
"Keep on your knees, do! Beg her to forgive!
"My cornet battered like a cannon-ball.
"Good-bye, I 'm gone!"—nor waited the reply.

That night at supper, out my husband broke,
"Why was that throwing, that buffoonery?
"Do you think I am your dupe? What man would dare

"Throw comfits in a stranger lady's lap?
"'T was knowledge of you bred such insolence
"In Caponsacchi; he dared shoot the bolt,
"Using that Conti for his stalking-horse.
"How could you see him this once and no more,
"When he is always haunting hereabout
"At the street-corner or the palace-side,
"Publishing my shame and your impudence?
"You are a wanton,—I a dupe, you think?
"O Christ, what hinders that I kill her quick?"
Whereat he drew his sword and feigned a thrust.

All this, now,—being not so strange to me,
Used to such misconception day by day
And broken-in to bear,—I bore, this time,
More quietly than woman should perhaps;
Repeated the mere truth and held my tongue.

Then he said, "Since you play the ignorant,
"I shall instruct you. This amour,—commenced
"Or finished or midway in act, all 's one,—
"'T is the town-talk; so my revenge shall be.
"Does he presume because he is a priest?
"I warn him that the sword I wear shall pink
"His lily-scented cassock through and through,
"Next time I catch him underneath your eaves!"

But he had threatened with the sword so oft
And, after all, not kept his promise. All
I said was "Let God save the innocent!
"Moreover death is far from a bad fate.
"I shall go pray for you and me, not him;
"And then I look to sleep, come death or, worse,
"Life." So, I slept.

There may have elapsed a week,
When Margherita,—called my waiting-maid,
Whom it is said my husband found too fair—
Who stood and heard the charge and the reply,
Who never once would let the matter rest
From that night forward, but rang changes still
On this the thrust and that the shame, and how
Good cause for jealousy cures jealous fools,
And what a paragon was this same priest
She talked about until I stopped my ears,—
She said, "A week is gone; you comb your hair,
"Then go mope in a corner, cheek on palm,
"Till night comes round again,—so, waste a week
"As if your husband menaced you in sport.
"Have not I some acquaintance with his tricks?
"Oh no, he did not stab the serving-man
"Who made and sang the rhymes about me once!
"For why? They sent him to the wars next day.

"Nor poisoned he the foreigner, my friend
"Who wagered on the whiteness of my breast,—
"The swarth skins of our city in dispute:
"For, though he paid me proper compliment,
"The Count well knew he was besotted with
"Somebody else, a skin as black as ink,
"(As all the town knew save my foreigner)
"He found and wedded presently,—'Why need
"'Better revenge?'—the Count asked. But what 's here?
"A priest that does not fight, and cannot wed,
"Yet must be dealt with! If the Count took fire
"For the poor pastime of a minute,—me—
"What were the conflagration for yourself,
"Countess and lady-wife and all the rest?
"The priest will perish; you will grieve too late:
"So shall the city-ladies' handsomest
"Frankest and liberalest gentleman
"Die for you, to appease a scurvy dog
"Hanging 's too good for. Is there no escape?
"Were it not simple Christian charity
"To warn the priest be on his guard,—save him
"Assured death, save yourself from causing it?
"I meet him in the street. Give me a glove,
"A ring to show for token! Mum 's the word!"

I answered "If you were, as styled, my maid,

"I would command you: as you are, you say,
"My husband's intimate,—assist his wife
"Who can do nothing but entreat 'Be still!'
"Even if you speak truth and a crime is planned,
"Leave help to God as I am forced to do!
"There is no other help, or we should craze,
"Seeing such evil with no human cure.
"Reflect that God, who makes the storm desist,
"Can make an angry violent heart subside.
"Why should we venture teach Him governance?
"Never address me on this subject more!"

Next night she said "But I went, all the same,
"—Ay, saw your Caponsacchi in his house,
"And come back stuffed with news I must outpour.
"I told him 'Sir, my mistress is a stone:
"'Why should you harm her for no good you get?
"'For you do harm her—prowl about our place
"'With the Count never distant half the street,
"'Lurking at every corner, would you look!
"''T is certain she has witched you with a spell.
"'Are there not other beauties at your beck?
"'We all know, Donna This and Monna That
"'Die for a glance of yours, yet here you gaze!
"'Go make them grateful, leave the stone its cold!'

"And he—oh, he turned first white and then red,
"And then—'To her behest I bow myself,
"'Whom I love with my body and my soul:
"'Only a word i' the bowing! See, I write
"'One little word, no harm to see or hear!
"'Then, fear no further!' This is what he wrote.
"I know you cannot read,—therefore, let me!
"'*My idol!*'" . . .

But I took it from her hand
And tore it into shreds. "Why, join the rest
"Who harm me? Have I ever done you wrong?
"People have told me 't is you wrong myself:
"Let it suffice I either feel no wrong
"Or else forgive it,—yet you turn my foe!
"The others hunt me and you throw a noose!"

She muttered "Have your wilful way!" I slept.

Whereupon . . . no, I leave my husband out
It is not to do him more hurt, I speak.
Let it suffice, when misery was most,
One day, I swooned and got a respite so.
She stooped as I was slowly coming to,
This Margherita, ever on my trace,
And whispered—"Caponsacchi!"

If I drowned,
But woke afloat i' the wave with upturned eyes,
And found their first sight was a star! I turned—
For the first time, I let her have her will,
Heard passively,—"The imposthume at such head,
"One touch, one lancet-puncture would relieve,—
"And still no glance the good physician's way
"Who rids you of the torment in a trice!
"Still he writes letters you refuse to hear.
"He may prevent your husband, kill himself,
"So desperate and all fordone is he!
"Just hear the pretty verse he made to-day!
"A sonnet from Mirtillo. '*Peerless fair . . .*'
"All poetry is difficult to read,
"—The sense of it is, anyhow, he seeks
"Leave to contrive you an escape from hell,
"And for that purpose asks an interview.
"I can write, I can grant it in your name,
"Or, what is better, lead you to his house.
"Your husband dashes you against the stones;
"This man would place each fragment in a shrine:
"You hate him, love your husband!"

I returned
"It is not true I love my husband,—no,
"Nor hate this man. I listen while you speak,

" —Assured that what you say is false, the same :
" Much as when once, to me a little child,
" A rough gaunt man in rags, with eyes on fire,
" A crowd of boys and idlers at his heels,
" Rushed as I crossed the Square, and held my head
" In his two hands, ' Here 's she will let me speak ! 1171
" ' You little girl, whose eyes do good to mine,
" ' I am the Pope, am Sextus, now the Sixth ;
" ' And that Twelfth Innocent, proclaimed to-day,
" ' Is Lucifer disguised in human flesh ! 1175
" ' The angels, met in conclave, crowned me ! '—thus
" He gibbered and I listened ; but I knew
" All was delusion, ere folk interposed
" ' Unfasten him, the maniac ! ' Thus I know
" All your report of Caponsacchi false, 1180
" Folly or dreaming ; I have seen so much
" By that adventure at the spectacle,
" The face I fronted that one first, last time :
" He would belie it by such words and thoughts.
" Therefore while you profess to show him me, 1185
" I ever see his own face. Get you gone ! "

" —That will I, nor once open mouth again,—
" No, by Saint Joseph and the Holy Ghost !
" On your head be the damage, so adieu ! "

And so more days, more deeds I must forget,
'Till . . . what a strange thing now is to declare!
Since I say anything, say all if true!
And how my life seems lengthened as to serve!
It may be idle or inopportune,
But, true?—why, what was all I said but truth,
Even when I found that such as are untrue
Could only take the truth in through a lie?
Now—I am speaking truth to the Truth's self:
God will lend credit to my words this time.

It had got half through April. I arose
One vivid daybreak,—who had gone to bed
In the old way my wont those last three years,
Careless until, the cup drained, I should die.
The last sound in my ear, the over-night,
Had been a something let drop on the sly
In prattle by Margherita, "Soon enough
"Gaieties end, now Easter 's past: a week,
"And the Archbishop gets him back to Rome,—
"Everyone leaves the town for Rome, this Spring,—
"Even Caponsacchi, out of heart and hope,
"Resigns himself and follows with the flock."
I heard this drop and drop like rain outside
Fast-falling through the darkness while she spoke:
So had I heard with like indifference,

"And Michael's pair of wings will arrive first
"At Rome, to introduce the company,
"And bear him from our picture where he fights
"Satan,—expect to have that dragon loose
"And never a defender!"—my sole thought
Being still, as night came, "Done, another day!
"How good to sleep and so get nearer death!"—
When, what, first thing at daybreak, pierced the sleep
With a summons to me? Up I sprang alive,
Light in me, light without me, everywhere
Change! A broad yellow sunbeam was let fall
From heaven to earth,—a sudden drawbridge lay,
Along which marched a myriad merry motes,
Mocking the flies that crossed them and recrossed
In rival dance, companions new-born too.
On the house-eaves, a dripping shag of weed
Shook diamonds on each dull grey lattice-square,
As first one, then another bird leapt by,
And light was off, and lo was back again,
Always with one voice,—where are two such joys?—
The blessed building-sparrow! I stepped forth,
Stood on the terrace,—o'er the roofs, such sky!
My heart sang, "I too am to go away,
"I too have something I must care about,
"Carry away with me to Rome, to Rome!
"The bird brings hither sticks and hairs and wool,

" And nowhere else i' the world; what fly breaks rank,
" Falls out of the procession that befits,
" From window here to window there, with all
" The world to choose,—so well he knows his course?
" I have my purpose and my motive too,
" My march to Rome, like any bird or fly!
" Had I been dead! How right to be alive!
" Last night I almost prayed for leave to die,
" Wished Guido all his pleasure with the sword
" Or the poison,—poison, sword, was but a trick,
" Harmless, may God forgive him the poor jest!
" My life is charmed, will last till I reach Rome!
" Yesterday, but for the sin,—ah, nameless be
" The deed I could have dared against myself!
" Now—see if I will touch an unripe fruit
" And risk the health I want to have and use!
" Not to live, now, would be the wickedness,—
" For life means to make haste and go to Rome
" And leave Arezzo, leave all woes at once!"

Now, understand here, by no means mistake!
Long ago had I tried to leave that house
When it seemed such procedure would stop sin;
And still failed more the more I tried—at first
The Archbishop, as I told you,—next, our lord
The Governor,—indeed I found my way,

I went to the great palace where he rules,
Though I knew well 't was he who,—when I gave
A jewel or two, themselves had given me,
Back to my parents,—since they wanted bread,
They who had never let me want a nosegay,—he
Spoke of the jail for felons, if they kept
What was first theirs, then mine, so doubly theirs,
Though all the while my husband's most of all!
I knew well who had spoke the word wrought this:
Yet, being in extremity, I fled
To the Governor, as I say,—scarce opened lip
When—the cold cruel snicker close behind—
Guido was on my trace, already there,
Exchanging nod and wink for shrug and smile,
And I—pushed back to him and, for my pains
Paid with . . . but why remember what is past?
I sought out a poor friar the people call
The Roman, and confessed my sin which came
Of their sin,—that fact could not be repressed,—
The frightfulness of my despair in God:
And, feeling, through the grate, his horror shake,
Implored him, "Write for me who cannot write,
"Apprise my parents, make them rescue me!
"You bid me be courageous and trust God:
"Do you in turn dare somewhat, trust and write
"'Dear friends, who used to be my parents once,

" ' And now declare you have no part in me,
" ' This is some riddle I want wit to solve,
" ' Since you must love me with no difference.
" ' Even suppose you altered,—there 's your hate,
" ' To ask for : hate of you two dearest ones
" ' I shall find liker love than love found here,
" ' If husbands love their wives. Take me away
" ' And hate me as you do the gnats and fleas,
" ' Even the scorpions ! How I shall rejoice !'
" Write that and save me !" And he promised—wrote
Or did not write ; things never changed at all :
He was not like the Augustinian here !
Last, in a desperation I appealed
To friends, whoever wished me better days,
To Guillichini, that 's of kin,—" What, I—
" Travel to Rome with you ? A flying gout
" Bids me deny my heart and mind my leg ! "
Then I tried Conti, used to brave—laugh back
The louring thunder when his cousin scowled
At me protected by his presence : " You—
" Who well know what you cannot save me from,—
" Carry me off ! What frightens you, a priest ? "
He shook his head, looked grave—" Above my strength !
" Guido has claws that scratch, shows feline teeth ;
" A formidabler foe than I dare fret :
" Give me a dog to deal with, twice the size !

" Of course I am a priest and Canon too,
" But . . by the bye . . though both, not quite so bold
" As he, my fellow-Canon, brother-priest,
" The personage in such ill odour here
" Because of the reports—pure birth o' the brain!
" Our Caponsacchi, he 's your true Saint George
" To slay the monster, set the Princess free,
" And have the whole High-Altar to himself:
' I always think so when I see that piece
" I' the Pieve, that 's his church and mine, you know:
" Though you drop eyes at mention of his name!"

That name had got to take a half-grotesque
Half-ominous, wholly enigmatic sense,
Like any by-word, broken bit of song
Born with a meaning, changed by mouth and mouth
That mix it in a sneer or smile, as chance
Bids, till it now means nought but ugliness
And perhaps shame.

—All this intends to say,
That, over-night, the notion of escape
Had seemed distemper, dreaming; and the name,—
Not the man, but the name of him, thus made
Into a mockery and disgrace,—why, she
Who uttered it persistently, had laughed,

"I name his name, and there you start and wince
"As criminal from the red tongs' touch!"—yet now,
Now, as I stood letting morn bathe me bright,
Choosing which butterfly should bear my news,—
The white, the brown one, or that tinier blue,—
The Margherita, I detested so,
In she came—"The fine day, the good Spring time!
"What, up and out at window? That is best.
"No thought of Caponsacchi?—who stood there
"All night on one leg, like the sentry crane,
"Under the pelting of your water-spout—
"Looked last look at your lattice ere he leave
"Our city, bury his dead hope at Rome.
"Ay, go to looking-glass and make you fine,
"While he may die ere touch one least loose hair
"You drag at with the comb in such a rage!"

I turned—"Tell Caponsacchi he may come!"

"Tell him to come? Ah, but, for charity,
"A truce to fooling! Come? What,—come this eve?
"Peter and Paul! But I see through the trick!
"Yes, come, and take a flower-pot on his head,
"Flung from your terrace! No joke, sincere truth?"

How plainly I perceived hell flash and fade

O' the face of her,—the doubt that first paled joy,
Then, final reassurance I indeed
Was caught now, never to be free again!
What did I care?—who felt myself of force
To play with silk, and spurn the horsehair-springe.

" But—do you know that I have bade him come,
" And in your own name? I presumed so much,
" Knowing the thing you needed in your heart.
" But somehow—what had I to show in proof?
" He would not cóme: half-promised, that was all,
" And wrote the letters you refused to read.
" What is the message that shall move him now?"

" After the Ave Maria, at first dark,
" I will be standing on the terrace, say!"

" I would I had a good long lock of hair
" Should prove I was not lying! Never mind!"

Off she went—" May he not refuse, that 's all—
" Fearing a trick!"

I answered, " He will come."
And, all day, I sent prayer like incense up
To God the strong, God the beneficent,

God ever mindful in all strife and strait,
Who, for our own good, makes the need extreme,
Till at the last He puts forth might and saves.
An old rhyme came into my head and rang
Of how a virgin, for the faith of God,
Hid herself, from the Paynims that pursued,
In a cave's heart; until a thunderstone,
Wrapped in a flame, revealed the couch and prey
And they laughed—"Thanks to lightning, ours at last!"
And she cried "Wrath of God, assert His love!
"Servant of God, thou fire, befriend His child!"
And lo, the fire she grasped at, fixed its flash,
Lay in her hand a calm cold dreadful sword
She brandished till pursuers strewed the ground,
So did the souls within them die away,
As o'er the prostrate bodies, sworded, safe,
She walked forth to the solitudes and Christ:
So should I grasp the lightning and be saved!

And still, as the day wore, the trouble grew
Whereby I guessed there would be born a star,
Until at an intense throe of the dusk,
I started up, was pushed, I dare to say,
Out on the terrace, leaned and looked at last
Where the deliverer waited me: the same

Silent and solemn face, I first descried
At the spectacle, confronted mine once more.

So was that minute twice vouchsafed me, so
The manhood, wasted then, was still at watch
To save me yet a second time: no change
Here, though all else changed in the changing world!

I spoke on the instant, as my duty bade,
In some such sense as this, whatever the phrase.

"Friend, foolish words were borne from you to me;
"Your soul behind them is the pure strong wind,
"Not dust and feathers which its breath may bear:
"These to the witless seem the wind itself,
"Since proving thus the first of it they feel.
"If by mischance you blew offence my way,
"The straws are dropt, the wind desists no whit,
"And how such strays were caught up in the street
"And took a motion from you, why inquire?
"I speak to the strong soul, no weak disguise.
"If it be truth,—why should I doubt it truth?—
"You serve God specially, as priests are bound,
"And care about me, stranger as I am,
"So far as wish my good,—that miracle
"I take to intimate He wills you serve

"By saving me,—what else can He direct?
"Here is the service. Since a long while now,
"I am in course of being put to death:
"While death concerned nothing but me, I bowed
"The head and bade, in heart, my husband strike.
"Now I imperil something more, it seems,
"Something that 's truelier me than this myself,
"Something I trust in God and you to save.
"You go to Rome, they tell me: take me there,
"Put me back with my people!"

He replied—
The first word I heard ever from his lips,
All himself in it,—an eternity
Of speech, to match the immeasurable depth
O' the soul that then broke silence—"I am yours."

So did the star rise, soon to lead my step,
Lead on, nor pause before it should stand still
Above the House o' the Babe,—my babe to be,
That knew me first and thus made me know him,
That had his right of life and claim on mine,
And would not let me die till he was born,
But pricked me at the heart to save us both,
Saying "Have you the will? Leave God the way!"

And the way was Caponsacchi—"mine," thank God!
He was mine, he is mine, he will be mine.

No pause i' the leading and the light! I know,
Next night there was a cloud came, and not he:
But I prayed through the darkness till it broke
And let him shine. The second night, he came.

"The plan is rash; the project desperate:
"In such a flight needs must I risk your life,
"Give food for falsehood, folly or mistake,
"Ground for your husband's rancour and revenge"—
So he began again, with the same face.
I felt that, the same loyalty—one star
Turning now red that was so white before—
One service apprehended newly: just
A word of mine and there the white was back!

"No, friend, for you will take me! 'T is yourself
"Risk all, not I,—who let you, for I trust
"In the compensating great God: enough!
"I know you: when is it that you will come?"

"To-morrow at the day's dawn." Then I heard
What I should do: how to prepare for flight
And where to fly.

That night my husband bade
"—You, whom I loathe, beware you break my sleep
"This whole night! Couch beside me like the corpse
"I would you were!" The rest you know, I think—
How I found Caponsacchi and escaped.

And this man, men call sinner? Jesus Christ!
Of whom men said, with mouths Thyself mad'st once,
"He hath a devil"—say he was Thy saint,
My Caponsacchi! Shield and show—unshroud
In Thine own time the glory of the soul
If aught obscure,—if ink-spot, from vile pens
Scribbling a charge against him—(I was glad
Then, for the first time, that I could not write)—
Flirted his way, have flecked the blaze!

For me,
'T is otherwise: let men take, sift my thoughts
—Thoughts I throw like the flax for sun to bleach!
I did pray, do pray, in the prayer shall die,
"Oh, to have Caponsacchi for my guide!"
Ever the face upturned to mine, the hand
Holding my hand across the world,—a sense
That reads, as only such can read, the mark
God sets on woman, signifying so
She should—shall peradventure—be divine;

Yet 'ware, the while, how weakness mars the print
And makes confusion, leaves the thing men see,
—Not this man sees,—who from his soul, re-writes
The obliterated charter,—love and strength
Mending what 's marred. "So kneels a votarist,
"Weeds some poor waste traditionary plot
"Where shrine once was, where temple yet may be,
"Purging the place but worshipping the while,
"By faith and not by sight, sight clearest so,—
"Such way the saints work,"—says Don Celestine.
But I, not privileged to see a saint
Of old when such walked earth with crown and palm,
If I call "saint" what saints call something else—
The saints must bear with me, impute the fault
To a soul i' the bud, so starved by ignorance,
Stinted of warmth, it will not blow this year
Nor recognize the orb which Spring-flowers know.
But if meanwhile some insect with a heart
Worth floods of lazy music, spendthrift joy—
Some fire-fly renounced Spring for my dwarfed cup,
Crept close to me, brought lustre for the dark,
Comfort against the cold,—what though excess
Of comfort should miscall the creature—sun?
What did the sun to hinder while harsh hands
Petal by petal, crude and colourless,
Tore me? This one heart gave me all the Spring!

Is all told? There 's the journey: and where 's time
To tell you how that heart burst out in shine?
Yet certain points do press on me too hard.
Each place must have a name, though I forget:
How strange it was—there where the plain begins
And the small river mitigates its flow—
When eve was fading fast, and my soul sank,
And he divined what surge of bitterness,
In overtaking me, would float me back
Whence I was carried by the striding day—
So,—"This grey place was famous once," said he—
And he began that legend of the place
As if in answer to the unspoken fear,
And told me all about a brave man dead,
Which lifted me and let my soul go on!
How did he know too,—at that town's approach
By the rock-side,—that in coming near the signs
Of life, the house-roofs and the church and tower,
I saw the old boundary and wall o' the world
Rise plain as ever round me, hard and cold,
As if the broken circlet joined again,
Tightened itself about me with no break,—
As if the town would turn Arezzo's self,—
The husband there,—the friends my enemies,
All ranged against me, not an avenue
To try, but would be blocked and drive me back

On him,—this other, . . . oh the heart in that!
Did not he find, bring, put into my arms
A new-born babe?—and I saw faces beam
Of the young mother proud to teach me joy,
And gossips round expecting my surprise
At the sudden hole through earth that lets in heaven.
I could believe himself by his strong will
Had woven around me what I thought the world
We went along in, every circumstance,
Towns, flowers and faces, all things helped so well!
For, through the journey, was it natural
Such comfort should arise from first to last?
As I look back, all is one milky way;
Still bettered more, the more remembered, so
Do new stars bud while I but search for old,
And fill all gaps i' the glory, and grow him—
Him I now see make the shine everywhere.
Even at the last when the bewildered flesh,
The cloud of weariness about my soul
Clogging too heavily, sucked down all sense,—
Still its last voice was, "He will watch and care;
"Let the strength go, I am content: he stays!"
I doubt not he did stay and care for all—
From that sick minute when the head swam round,
And the eyes looked their last and died on him,
As in his arms he caught me, and, you say,

Carried me in, that tragical red eve,
And laid me where I next returned to life
In the other red of morning, two red plates
That crushed together, crushed the time between,
And are since then a solid fire to me,—
When in, my dreadful husband and the world
Broke,—and I saw him, master, by hell's right,
And saw my angel helplessly held back
By guards that helped the malice—the lamb prone,
The serpent towering and triumphant—then
Came all the strength back in a sudden swell,
I did for once see right, do right, give tongue
The adequate protest: for a worm must turn
If it would have its wrong observed by God.
I did spring up, attempt to thrust aside
That ice-block 'twixt the sun and me, lay low
The neutralizer of all good and truth.
If I sinned so,—never obey voice more
O' the Just and Terrible, who bids us—"Bear!"
Not—"Stand by, bear to see my angels bear!"
I am clear it was on impulse to serve God
Not save myself,—no—nor my child unborn!
Had I else waited patiently till now?—
Who saw my old kind parents, silly-sooth
And too much trustful, for their worst of faults,
Cheated, brow-beaten, stripped and starved, cast out

Into the kennel: I remonstrated,
Then sank to silence, for,—their woes at end,
Themselves gone,—only I was left to plague.
If only I was threatened and belied,
What matter? I could bear it and did bear;
It was a comfort, still one lot for all:
They were not persecuted for my sake
And I, estranged, the single happy one.
But when at last, all by myself I stood
Obeying the clear voice which bade me rise,
Not for my own sake but my babe unborn,
And take the angel's hand was sent to help—
And found the old adversary athwart the path—
Not my hand simply struck from the angel's, but
The very angel's self made foul i' the face
By the fiend who struck there,—that I would not bear,
That only I resisted! So, my first
And last resistance was invincible.
Prayers move God; threats, and nothing else, move men!
I must have prayed a man as he were God
When I implored the Governor to right
My parents' wrongs: the answer was a smile.
The Archbishop,—did I clasp his feet enough,
Hide my face hotly on them, while I told
More than I dared make my own mother know?

The profit was—compassion and a jest.
This time, the foolish prayers were done with, right
Used might, and solemnized the sport at once.
All was against the combat: vantage, mine?
The runaway avowed, the accomplice-wife,
In company with the plan-contriving priest?
Yet, shame thus rank and patent, I struck, bare,
At foe from head to foot in magic mail,
And off it withered, cobweb-armoury
Against the lightning! 'T was truth singed the lies
And saved me, not the vain sword nor weak speech!

You see, I will not have the service fail!
I say, the angel saved me: I am safe!
Others may want and wish, I wish nor want
One point o' the circle plainer, where I stand
Traced round about with white to front the world.
What of the calumny I came across,
What o' the way to the end?—the end crowns all.
The judges judged aright i' the main, gave me
The uttermost of my heart's desire, a truce
From torture and Arezzo, balm for hurt,
With the quiet nuns,—God recompense the good!
Who said and sang away the ugly past.
And, when my final fortune was revealed,
What safety while, amid my parents' arms,

My babe was given me! Yes, he saved my babe:
It would not have peeped forth, the bird-like thing,
Through that Arezzo noise and trouble: back
Had it returned nor ever let me see!
But the sweet peace cured all, and let me live
And give my bird the life among the leaves
God meant him! Weeks and months of quietude,
I could lie in such peace and learn so much—
Begin the task, I see how needful now,
Of understanding somewhat of my past,—
Know life a little, I should leave so soon.
Therefore, because this man restored my soul,
All has been right; I have gained my gain, enjoyed
As well as suffered,—nay, got foretaste too
Of better life beginning where this ends—
All through the breathing-while allowed me thus,
Which let good premonitions reach my soul
Unthwarted, and benignant influence flow
And interpenetrate and change my heart,
Uncrossed by what was wicked,—nay, unkind.
For, as the weakness of my time drew nigh,
Nobody did me one disservice more,
Spoke coldly or looked strangely, broke the love
I lay in the arms of, till my boy was born,
Born all in love, with nought to spoil the bliss
A whole long fortnight: in a life like mine

A fortnight filled with bliss is long and much.
All women are not mothers of a boy,
Though they live twice the length of my whole life,
And, as they fancy, happily all the same.
There I lay, then, all my great fortnight long,
As if it would continue, broaden out
Happily more and more, and lead to heaven:
Christmas before me,—was not that a chance?
I never realized God's birth before—
How He grew likest God in being born.
This time I felt like Mary, had my babe
Lying a little on my breast like hers.
So all went on till, just four days ago—
The night and the tap.

Oh it shall be success
To the whole of our poor family! My friends
. . . Nay, father and mother,—give me back my word!
They have been rudely stripped of life, disgraced
Like children who must needs go clothed too fine,
Carry the garb of Carnival in Lent.
If they too much affected frippery,
They have been punished and submit themselves,
Say no word: all is over, they see God
Who will not be extreme to mark their fault
Or He had granted respite: they are safe.

For that most woeful man my husband once,
Who, needing respite, still draws vital breath,
I—pardon him? So far as lies in me,
I give him for his good the life he takes,
Praying the world will therefore acquiesce.
Let him make God amends,—none, none to me
Who thank him rather that, whereas strange fate
Mockingly styled him husband and me wife,
Himself this way at least pronounced divorce,
Blotted the marriage-bond: this blood of mine
Flies forth exultingly at any door,
Washes the parchment white, and thanks the blow.
We shall not meet in this world nor the next,
But where will God be absent? In His face
Is light, but in His shadow healing too:
Let Guido touch the shadow and be healed!
And as my presence was importunate,—
My earthly good, temptation and a snare,—
Nothing about me but drew somehow down
His hate upon me,—somewhat so excused
Therefore, since hate was thus the truth of him,—
May my evanishment for evermore
Help further to relieve the heart that cast
Such object of its natural loathing forth!
So he was made; he nowise made himself:
I could not love him, but his mother did.

His soul has never lain beside my soul:
But for the unresisting body,—thanks!
He burned that garment spotted by the flesh.
Whatever he touched is rightly ruined: plague
It caught, and disinfection it had craved
Still but for Guido; I am saved through him
So as by fire; to him—thanks and farewell!

Even for my babe, my boy, there 's safety thence—
From the sudden death of me, I mean: we poor
Weak souls, how we endeavour to be strong!
I was already using up my life,—
This portion, now, should do him such a good,
This other go to keep off such an ill!
The great life; see, a breath and it is gone!
So is detached, so left all by itself
The little life, the fact which means so much.
Shall not God stoop the kindlier to His work,
His marvel of creation, foot would crush,
Now that the hand He trusted to receive
And hold it, lets the treasure fall perforce?
The better; He shall have in orphanage
His own way all the clearlier: if my babe
Outlived the hour—and he has lived two weeks—
It is through God who knows I am not by.
Who is it makes the soft gold hair turn black,

And sets the tongue, might lie so long at rest,
Trying to talk? Let us leave God alone!
Why should I doubt He will explain in time
What I feel now, but fail to find the words?
My babe nor was, nor is, nor yet shall be
Count Guido Franceschini's child at all—
Only his mother's, born of love not hate!
So shall I have my rights in after-time.
It seems absurd, impossible to-day;
So seems so much else, not explained but known!

Ah! Friends, I thank and bless you every one!
No more now: I withdraw from earth and man
To my own soul, compose myself for God.

Well, and there is more! Yes, my end of breath
Shall bear away my soul in being true!
He is still here, not outside with the world,
Here, here, I have him in his rightful place!
'T is now, when I am most upon the move,
I feel for what I verily find—again
The face, again the eyes, again, through all,
The heart and its immeasurable love
Of my one friend, my only, all my own,
Who put his breast between the spears and me.
Ever with Caponsacchi! Otherwise

Here alone would be failure, loss to me—
How much more loss to him, with life debarred
From giving life, love locked from love's display,
The day-star stopped its task that makes night morn!
O lover of my life, O soldier-saint,
No work begun shall ever pause for death!
Love will be helpful to me more and more
I' the coming course, the new path I must tread—
My weak hand in thy strong hand, strong for that!
Tell him that if I seem without him now,
That 's the world's insight: Oh, he understands!
He is at Civita—do I once doubt
The world again is holding us apart?
He had been here, displayed in my behalf
The broad brow that reverberates the truth,
And flashed the word God gave him, back to man!
I know where the free soul is flown! My fate
Will have been hard for even him to bear:
Let it confirm him in the trust of God,
Showing how holily he dared the deed!
And, for the rest,—say, from the deed, no touch
Of harm came, but all good, all happiness,
Not one faint fleck of failure! Why explain?
What I see, oh, he sees and how much more!
Tell him,—I know not wherefore the true word
Should fade and fall unuttered at the last—

It was the name of him I sprang to meet
When came the knock, the summons and the end.
"My great heart, my strong hand are back again!"
I would have sprung to these, beckoning across
Murder and hell gigantic and distinct
O' the threshold, posted to exclude me heaven:
He is ordained to call and I to come!
Do not the dead wear flowers when dressed for God?
Say,—I am all in flowers from head to foot!
Say,—not one flower of all he said and did,
Might seem to flit unnoticed, fade unknown,
But dropped a seed, has grown a balsam-tree
Whereof the blossoming perfumes the place
At this supreme of moments! He is a priest;
He cannot marry therefore, which is right:
I think he would not marry if he could.
Marriage on earth seems such a counterfeit,
Mere imitation of the inimitable:
In heaven we have the real and true and sure.
'T is there they neither marry nor are given
In marriage but are as the angels: right,
Oh how right that is, how like Jesus Christ
To say that! Marriage-making for the earth,
With gold so much,—birth, power, repute so much,
Or beauty, youth so much, in lack of these!
Be as the angels rather, who, apart,

Know themselves into one, are found at length
Married, but marry never, no, nor give
In marriage; they are man and wife at once
When the true time is: here we have to wait
Not so long neither! Could we by a wish
Have what we will and get the future now,
Would we wish aught done undone in the past?
So, let him wait God's instant men call years;
Meantime hold hard by truth and his great soul,
Do out the duty! Through such souls alone
God stooping shows sufficient of His light
For us i' the dark to rise by. And I rise.

VIII.

DOMINUS HYACINTHUS DE ARCHANGELIS,

PAUPERUM PROCURATOR.

Ah, my Giacinto, he 's no ruddy rogue,
Is not Cinone? What, to-day we 're eight?
Seven and one 's eight, I hope, old curly-pate!
—Branches me out his verb-tree on the slate,
Amo -as -avi -atum -are -ans,
Up to *-aturus*, person, tense, and mood,
Quies me cum subjunctivo (I could cry)
And chews Corderius with his morning crust!
Look eight years onward, and he 's perched, he 's perched
Dapper and deft on stool beside this chair,
Cinozzo, Cinoncello, who but he?
—Trying his milk-teeth on some crusty case
Like this, papa shall triturate full soon
To smooth Papinianian pulp!
It trots

Already through my head, though noon be now,
Does supper-time and what belongs to eve.
Dispose, O Don, o' the day, first work then play!
—The proverb bids. And "then" means, won't we hold
Our little yearly lovesome frolic feast,
Cinuolo's birth-night, Cinicello's own,
That makes gruff January grin perforce!
For too contagious grows the mirth, the warmth
Escaping from so many hearts at once—
When the good wife, buxom and bonny yet,
Jokes the hale grandsire,—such are just the sort
To go off suddenly,—he who hides the key
O' the box beneath his pillow every night,—
Which box may hold a parchment (someone thinks)
Will show a scribbled something like a name
"Cinino, Ciniccino," near the end,
"To whom I give and I bequeath my lands,
"Estates, tenements, hereditaments,
"When I decease as honest grandsire ought."
Wherefore—yet this one time again perhaps—
Shan't my Orvieto fuddle his old nose!
Then, uncles, one or the other, well i' the world,
May—drop in, merely?—trudge through rain and wind,
Rather! The smell-feasts rouse them at the hint
There 's cookery in a certain dwelling-place!

Gossips, too, each with keepsake in his poke,
Will pick the way, thrid lane by lantern-light,
And so find door, put galligaskin off
At entry of a decent domicile
Cornered in snug Condotti,—all for love,
All to crush cup with Cinucciatolo!
Well,
Let others climb the heights o' the court, the camp!
How vain are chambering and wantonness,
Revel and rout and pleasures that make mad!
Commend me to home-joy, the family board,
Altar and hearth! These, with a brisk career,
A source of honest profit and good fame,
Just so much work as keeps the brain from rust,
Just so much play as lets the heart expand,
Honouring God and serving man,—I say,
These are reality, and all else,—fluff,
Nutshell and naught,—thank Flaccus for the phrase!
Suppose I had been Fisc, yet bachelor!

Why, work with a will, then! Wherefore lazy now?
Turn up the hour-glass, whence no sand-grain slips
But should have done its duty to the saint
O' the day, the son and heir that 's eight years old!
Let law come dimple Cinoncino's cheek,
And Latin dumple Cinarello's chin,

The while we spread him fine and toss him flat
This pulp that makes the pancake, trim our mass
Of matter into Argument the First,
Prime Pleading in defence of our accused,
Which, once a-waft on paper wing, shall soar,
Shall signalize before applausive Rome
What study, and mayhap some mother-wit,
Can do toward making Master fop and Fisc
Old bachelor Bottinius bite his thumb.
Now, how good God is! How falls plumb to point
This murder, gives me Guido to defend
Now, of all days i' the year, just when the boy
Verges on Virgil, reaches the right age
For some such illustration from his sire,
Stimulus to himself! One might wait years
And never find the chance which now finds me!
The fact is, there 's a blessing on the hearth.
A special providence for fatherhood!
Here 's a man, and what 's more, a noble, kills
—Not sneakingly but almost with parade—
Wife's father and wife's mother and wife's self
That 's mother's self of son and heir (like mine!)
—And here stand I, the favoured advocate,
Who pluck this flower o' the field, no Solomon
Was ever clothed in glorious gold to match,
And set the same in Cinoncino's cap!

I defend Guido and his comrades—I!
Pray God, I keep me humble: not to me—
Non nobis, Domine, sed tibi laus!
How the fop chuckled when they made him Fisc!
We 'll beat you, my Bottinius, all for love,
All for our tribute to Cinotto's day.
Why, 'sbuddikins, old Innocent himself
May rub his eyes at the bustle,—ask "What 's this
"Rolling from out the rostrum, as a gust
"O' the *Pro Milone* had been prisoned there,
"And rattled Rome awake?" Awaken Rome,
How can the Pope doze on in decency?
He needs must wake up also, speak his word,
Have his opinion like the rest of Rome,
About this huge, this hurly-burly case:
He wants who can excogitate the truth,
Give the result in speech, plain black and white,
To mumble in the mouth and make his own
—A little changed, good man, a little changed!
No matter, so his gratitude be moved,
By when my Giacintino gets of age,
Mindful of who thus helped him at a pinch,
Archangelus *Procurator Pauperum*—
And proved Hortensius *Redivivus!*
Whew!
To earn the *Est-est*, merit the minced herb

That mollifies the liver's leathery slice,
With here a goose-foot, there a cock's-comb stuck,
Cemented in an element of cheese!
I doubt if dainties do the grandsire good:
Last June he had a sort of strangling . . . bah!
He 's his own master, and his will is made.
So, liver fizz, law flit and Latin fly
As we rub hands o'er dish by way of grace!
May I lose cause if I vent one word more
Except,—with fresh-cut quill we ink the white,—
P-r-o-pro Guidone et Sociis. There!

Count Guido married—or, in Latin due,
What? *Duxit in uxorem?*—commonplace!
Tædas jugales iniit, subiit,—ha!
He underwent the matrimonial torch?
Connubio stabili sibi junxit,—hum!
In stable bond of marriage bound his own?
That 's clear of any modern taint: and yet . . .

Virgil is little help to who writes prose.
He shall attack me Terence with the dawn,
Shall Cinuccino! Mum, mind business, Sir!
Thus circumstantially evolve we facts,
Ita se habet ideo series facti:
He wedded,—ah, with owls for augury!

Nupserat, heu sinistris avibus,
One of the blood Arezzo boasts her best,
Dominus Guido, nobili genere ortus,
Pompiliæ . . .

But the version afterward!
Curb we this ardour! Notes alone, to-day,
The speech to-morrow and the Latin last:
Such was the rule in Farinacci's time.
Indeed I hitched it into verse and good.
Unluckily, law quite absorbs a man,
Or else I think I too had poetized.
"Law is the pork substratum of the fry,
"Goose-foot and cock's-comb are Latinity,"—
And in this case, if circumstance assist,
We 'll garnish law with idiom, never fear!
Out-of-the-way events extend our scope:
For instance, when Bottini brings his charge,
"That letter which you say Pompilia wrote,—
"To criminate her parents and herself
"And disengage her husband from the coil,—
"That, Guido Franceschini wrote, say we:
"Because Pompilia could nor read nor write,
"Therefore he pencilled her such letter first,
"Then made her trace in ink the same again."
—Ha, my Bottini, have I thee on hip?

How will he turn this and break Tully's pate?
"*Existimandum*" (don't I hear the dog!)
"*Quod Guido designaverit elementa*
"*Dictæ epistolæ, quæ fuerint*
"(*Superinducto ab ea calamo*)
"*Notata atramento*"—there 's a style!—
"*Quia ipsa scribere nesciebat.*" Boh!
Now, my turn! Either, *Insulse!* (I outburst)
Stupidly put! Inane is the response,
Inanis est responsio, or the like—
To-wit, that each of all those characters,
Quod singula elementa epistolæ,
Had first of all been traced for her by him,
Fuerant per eum prius designata,
And then, the ink applied a-top of that,
Et deinde, superinducto calamo,
The piece, she says, became her handiwork,
Per eam, efformata, ut ipsa asserit.
Inane were such response! (a second time:)
Her husband outlined her the whole, forsooth?
Vir ejus lineabat epistolam?
What, she confesses that she wrote the thing,
Fatetur eam scripsisse, (scorn that scathes!)
That she might pay obedience to her lord?
Ut viro obtemperaret, apices
(Here repeat charge with proper varied phrase)

Eo designante, ipsaque calamum
Super inducente? By such argument,
Ita pariter, she seeks to show the same,
(Ay, by Saint Joseph and what saints you please)
Epistolam ostendit, medius fidius,
No voluntary deed but fruit of force!
Non voluntarie sed coacte scriptam!
That 's the way to write Latin, friend my Fisc!
Bottini is a beast, one barbarous:
Look out for him when he attempts to say
"Armed with a pistol, Guido followed her!"
Will not I be beforehand with my Fisc,
Cut away phrase by phrase from underfoot!
Guido Pompiliam—Guido thus his wife
Following with igneous engine, shall I have?
Armis munitus igneis persequens—
Arma sulphurea gestans, sulphury arms,
Or, might one style a pistol—popping-piece?
Armatus breviori sclopulo?
We 'll let him have been armed so, though it make
Somewhat against us: I had thought to own—
Provided with a simple travelling-sword,
Ense solummodo viatorio
Instructus: but we 'll grant the pistol here:
Better we lost the cause than lacked the gird
At the Fisc's Latin, lost the Judge's laugh!

It 's Venturini that decides for style.
Tommati rather goes upon the law.
So, as to law,—

Ah, but with law ne'er hope
To level the fellow,—don't I know his trick!
How he draws up, ducks under, twists aside!
He 's a lean-gutted hectic rascal, fine
As pale-haired red-eyed ferret which pretends
'T is ermine, pure soft snow from tail to snout.
He eludes law by piteous looks aloft,
Lets Latin glance off as he makes appeal
To saint that 's somewhere in the ceiling-top:
Do you suppose I don't conceive the beast?
Plague of the ermine-vermin! For it takes,
It takes, and here 's the fellow Fisc, you see,
And Judge, you 'll not be long in seeing next!
Confound the fop—he 's now at work like me:
Enter his study, as I seem to do,
Hear him read out his writing to himself!
I know he writes as if he spoke: I hear
The hoarse shrill throat, see shut eyes, neck shot-forth,
—I see him strain on tiptoe, soar and pour
Eloquence out, nor stay nor stint at all—
Perorate in the air, then quick to press
With the product! What abuse of type and sheet!

He 'll keep clear of my cast, my logic-throw,
Let argument slide, and then deliver swift
Some bowl from quite an unguessed point of stand—
Having the luck o' the last word, the reply!
A plaguy cast, a mortifying stroke:
You face a fellow—cries "So, there you stand?
"But I discourteous jump clean o'er your head!
"You take ship-carpentry for pilotage,
"Stop rat-holes, while a sea sweeps through the breach,—
"Hammer and fortify at puny points?
"'Do, clamp and tenon, make all tight and safe!
"'T is here and here and here you ship a sea,
"No good of your stopped leaks and littleness!"

Yet what do I name "little and a leak"?
The main defence o' the murder 's used to death,
By this time, dry bare bones, no scrap we pick:
Safer I worked the new, the unforeseen,
The nice by-stroke, the fine and improvised
Point that can titillate the brain o' the Bench
Torpid with over-teaching, long ago!
As if Tommati (that has heard, reheard
And heard again, first this side and then that—
Guido and Pietro, Pietro and Guido, din
And deafen, full three years, at each long ear)
Don't want amusement for instruction now,

Won't rather feel a flea run o'er his ribs,
Than a daw settle heavily on his head!
Oh I was young and had the trick of fence,
Knew subtle pass and push with careless right—
My left arm ever quiet behind back,
With dagger ready: not both hands to blade!
Puff and blow, put the strength out, Blunderbore!
There's my subordinate, young Spreti, now,
Pedant and prig,—he 'll pant away at proof,
That 's his way!

Now for mine—to rub some life
Into one's choppy fingers this cold day!
I trust Cinuzzo ties on tippet, guards
The precious throat on which so much depends!
Guido must be all goose-flesh in his hole,
Despite the prison-straw: bad Carnival
For captives! no sliced fry for him, poor Count!

Carnival-time,—another providence!
The town a-swarm with strangers to amuse,
To edify, to give one's name and fame
In charge of, till they find, some future day,
Cintino come and claim it, his name too,
Pledge of the pleasantness they owe papa—
Who else was it cured Rome of her great qualms.

When she must needs have her own judgment?—ay,
When all her topping wits had set to work,
Pronounced already on the case: mere boys,
Twice Cineruggiolo's age with half his sense,
As good as tell me, when I cross the court,
"Master Arcangeli!" (plucking at my gown)
"We can predict, we comprehend your play,
"We 'll help you save your client." Tra-la-la!
I 've travelled ground, from childhood to this hour,
To have the town anticipate my track?
The old fox takes the plain and velvet path,
The young hound's predilection,—prints the dew,
Don't he, to suit their pulpy pads of paw?
No! Burying nose deep down i' the briery bush,
Thus I defend Count Guido.
Where are we weak?
First, which is foremost in advantage too,
Our murder,—we call, killing,—is a fact
Confessed, defended, made a boast of: good!
To think the Fisc claimed use of torture here,
And got thereby avowal plump and plain
That gives me just the chance I wanted,—scope
Not for brute-force but ingenuity,
Explaining matters, not denying them!
One may dispute,—as I am bound to do,
And shall,—validity of process here:

Inasmuch as a noble is exempt
From torture which plebeians undergo
In such a case: for law is lenient, lax,
Remits the torture to a nobleman
Unless suspicion be of twice the strength
Attaches to a man born vulgarly:
We don't card silk with comb that dresses wool.
Moreover 't was severity undue
In this case, even had the lord been lout.
What utters, on this head, our oracle,
Our Farinacci, my Gamaliel erst,
In those immortal "Questions"? This I quote:
"Of all the tools at Law's disposal, sure
"That named *Vigiliarum* is the best—
"That is, the worst—to whoso needs must bear:
"Lasting, as it may do, from some seven hours
"To ten; (beyond ten, we 've no precedent;
"Certain have touched their ten, but, bah, they died!)
"It does so efficaciously convince,
"That,—speaking by much observation here,—
"Out of each hundred cases, by my count,
"Never I knew of patients beyond four
"Withstand its taste, or less than ninety-six
"End by succumbing: only martyrs four,
"Of obstinate silence, guilty or no,—against
"Ninety-six full confessors, innocent

"Or otherwise,—so shrewd a tool have we!"
No marvel either: in unwary hands,
Death on the spot is no rare consequence:
As indeed all but happened in this case
To one of ourselves, our young tough peasant-friend
The accomplice called Baldeschi: they were rough,
Dosed him with torture as you drench a horse,
Not modify your treatment to a man:
So, two successive days he fainted dead,
And only on the third essay, gave up,
Confessed like flesh and blood. We could reclaim,—
Blockhead Bottini giving cause enough!
But no,—we 'll take it as spontaneously
Confessed: we 'll have the murder beyond doubt.
Ah, fortunate (the poet's word reversed)
Inasmuch as we know our happiness!
Had the antagonist left dubiety,
Here were we proving murder a mere myth,
And Guido innocent, ignorant, absent,—ay,
Absent! He was—why, where should Christian be? —
Engaged in visiting his proper church,
The duty of us all at Christmas-time,
When Caponsacchi, the seducer, stung
To madness by his relegation, cast
About him and contrived a remedy
In murder: since opprobrium broke afresh,

By birth o' the babe, on him the imputed sire,
He it was quietly sought to smother up
His shame and theirs together,—killed the three,
And fled—(go seek him where you please to search)—
Just at the time when Guido, touched by grace,
Devotions ended, hastened to the spot,
Meaning to pardon his convicted wife,
"Neither do I condemn thee, go in peace!"—
And thus arrived i' the nick of time to catch
The charge o' the killing, though great-heartedly
He came but to forgive and bring to life.
Doubt ye the force of Christmas on the soul?
"Is thine eye evil because mine is good?"

So, doubtless, had I needed argue here
But for the full confession round and sound!
Thus might you wrong some kingly alchemist,—
Whose concern should not be with showing brass
Transmuted into gold, but triumphing,
Rather, about his gold changed out of brass,
Not vulgarly to the mere sight and touch,
But in the idea, the spiritual display,
The apparition buoyed by winged words
Hovering above its birth-place in the brain,—
Thus would you wrong this excellent personage
Forced, by the gross need, to gird apron round,

Plant forge, light fire, ply bellows,—in a word,
Demonstrate: when a faulty pipkin's crack
May disconcert you his presumptive truth!
Here were I hanging to the testimony
Of one of these poor rustics—four, ye gods!
Whom the first taste of friend the Fiscal's cord
May drive into undoing my whole speech,
Undoing, on his birthday,—what is worse,—
My son and heir!
I wonder, all the same,
Not so much at those peasants' lack of heart;
But—Guido Franceschini, nobleman,
Bear pain no better! Everybody knows
It used once, when my father was a boy,
To form a proper, nay, important point
I' the education of our well-born youth,
That they took torture handsomely at need,
Without confessing in this clownish guise.
Each noble had his rack for private use,
And would, for the diversion of a guest,
Bid it be set up in the yard of arms,
And take thereon his hour of exercise,—
Command the varletry stretch, strain their best,
While friends looked on, admired my lord could smile
'Mid tugging which had caused an ox to roar.
Men are no longer men!

—And advocates
No longer Farinacci, let us add,
If I one more time fly from point proposed!
So, *Vindicatio*,—here begins the speech!—
Honoris causa; thus we make our stand:
Honour in us had injury, we prove.
Or if we fail to prove such injury
More than misprision of the fact,—what then?
It is enough, authorities declare,
If the result, the deed in question now,
Be caused by confidence that injury
Is veritable and no figment: since,
What, though proved fancy afterward, seemed fact
At the time, they argue shall excuse result.
That which we do, persuaded of good cause
For what we do, hold justifiable!—
So casuists bid: man, bound to do his best,
They would not have him leave that best undone
And mean to do his worst,—though fuller light
Show best was worst and worst would have been best.
Act by the present light!—they ask of man.
Ultra quod hic non agitur, besides
It is not anyway our business here,
De probatione adulterii,
To prove what we thought crime was crime indeed,
Ad irrogandam pœnam, and require

Its punishment: such nowise do we seek:
Sed ad effectum, but 't is our concern,
Excusandi, here to simply find excuse,
Occisorem, for who did the killing-work,
Et ad illius defensionem, (mark
The difference) and defend the man, just that!
Quo casu levior probatio
Exuberaret, to which end far lighter proof
Suffices than the prior case would claim:
It should be always harder to convict,
In short, than to establish innocence.
Therefore we shall demonstrate first of all
That Honour is a gift of God to man
Precious beyond compare: which natural sense
Of human rectitude and purity,—
Which white, man's soul is born with,—brooks no touch:
Therefore, the sensitivest spot of all,
Wounded by any wafture breathed from black,
Is,—honour within honour, like the eye
Centred i' the ball,—the honour of our wife.
Touch us o' the pupil of our honour, then,
Not actually,—since so you slay outright,—
But by a gesture simulating touch,
Presumable mere menace of such taint,—
This were our warrant for eruptive ire
"To whose dominion I impose no end."

(Virgil, now, should not be too difficult
To Cinoncino,—say, the early books.
Pen, truce to further gambols! *Poscimur!*)

Nor can revenge of injury done here
To the honour proved the life and soul of us,
Be too excessive, too extravagant:
Such wrong seeks and must have complete revenge.
Show we this, first, on the mere natural ground:
Begin at the beginning, and proceed
Incontrovertibly. Theodoric,
In an apt sentence Cassiodorus cites,
Propounds for basis of all household law—
I hardly recollect it, but it ends,
"Bird mates with bird, beast genders with his like,
"And brooks no interference." Bird and beast?
The very insects . . . if they wive or no,
How dare I say when Aristotle doubts?
But the presumption is they likewise wive,
At least the nobler sorts; for take the bee
As instance,—copying King Solomon,—
Why that displeasure of the bee to aught
Which savours of incontinency, makes
The unchaste a very horror to the hive?
Whence comes it bees obtain their epithet
Of *castæ apes*, notably "the chaste"?

Because, ingeniously saith Scaliger,
(The young sage,—see his book of Table-talk)
"Such is their hatred of immodest act,
"They fall upon the offender, sting to death."
I mind a passage much confirmative
I' the Idyllist (though I read him Latinized)
"Why" asks a shepherd, "is this bank unfit
"For celebration of our vernal loves?"
"Oh swain," returns the instructed shepherdess,
"Bees swarm here, and would quick resent our warmth!"
Only cold-blooded fish lack instinct here,
Nor gain nor guard connubiality:
But beasts, quadrupedal, mammiferous,
Do credit to their beasthood: witness him
That Ælian cites, the noble elephant,
(Or if not Ælian, somebody as sage)
Who seeing, much offence beneath his nose,
His master's friend exceed in courtesy
The due allowance to his master's wife,
Taught them good manners and killed both at once,
Making his master and the world admire.
Indubitably, then, that master's self,
Favoured by circumstance, had done the same
Or else stood clear rebuked by his own beast.
Adeo, ut qui honorem spernit, thus,

Who values his own honour not a straw,—
Et non recuperare curat, nor
Labours by might and main to salve its wound,
Se ulciscendo, by revenging him,
Nil differat a belluis, is a brute,
Quinimo irrationabilior
Ipsismet belluis, nay, contrariwise,
Much more irrational than brutes themselves,
Should be considered, *reputetur!* How?
If a poor animal feel honour smart,
Taught by blind instinct nature plants in him,
Shall man,—confessed creation's master-stroke,
Nay, intellectual glory, nay, a god,
Nay, of the nature of my Judges here,—
Shall man prove the insensible, the block,
The blot o' the earth he crawls on to disgrace?
(Come, that 's both solid and poetic!) Man
Derogate, live for the low tastes alone,
Mean creeping cares about the animal life?
Absit such homage to vile flesh and blood!

(May Gigia have remembered, nothing stings
Fried liver out of its monotony
Of richness, like a root of fennel, chopped
Fine with the parsley: parsley-sprigs, I said—
Was there need I should say "and fennel too"?

But no, she cannot have been so obtuse!
To our argument! The fennel will be chopped.)

From beast to man next mount we—ay, but, mind,
Still mere man, not yet Christian,—that, in time!
Not too fast, mark you! 'T is on Heathen grounds
We next defend our act: then, fairly urge—
If this were done of old, in a green tree,
Allowed in the Spring rawness of our kind,
What may be licensed in the Autumn dry
And ripe, the latter harvest-tide of man?
If, with his poor and primitive half-lights,
The Pagan, whom our devils served for gods,
Could stigmatise the breach of marriage-vow
As that which blood, blood only might efface,—
Absolve the husband, outraged, whose revenge
Anticipated law, plied sword himself,—
How with the Christian in full blaze of noon?
Shall not he rather double penalty,
Multiply vengeance, than, degenerate,
Let privilege be minished, droop, decay?
Therefore set forth at large the ancient law!
Superabundant the examples be
To pick and choose from. The Athenian Code,
Solon's, the name is serviceable,—then,
The Laws of the Twelve Tables, that fifteenth,—

"Romulus" likewise rolls out round and large;
The Julian; the Cornelian; Gracchus' Law:
So old a chime, the bells ring of themselves!
Spreti can set that going if he please,
I point you, for my part, the belfry plain,
Intent to rise from dusk, *diluculum*,
Into the Christian day shall broaden next.

First, the fit compliment to His Holiness
Happily reigning: then sustain the point—
All that was long ago declared as law
By the natural revelation, stands confirmed
By Apostle and Evangelist and Saint,—
To-wit—that Honour is man's supreme good.
Why should I baulk Saint Jerome of his phrase?
Ubi honor non est, where no honour is,
Ibi contemptus est; and where contempt,
Ibi injuria frequens; and where that,
The frequent injury, *ibi et indignatio;*
And where the indignation, *ibi quies*
Nulla: and where there is no quietude,
Why, *ibi*, there, the mind is often cast
Down from the heights where it proposed to dwell,
Mens a proposito sæpe dejicitur.
And naturally the mind is so cast down,
Since harder 't is, *quum difficilius sit*,

Iram cohibere, to coerce one's wrath,
Quam miracula facere, than work miracles,—
So Gregory smiles in his First Dialogue.
Whence we infer, the ingenuous soul, the man
Who makes esteem of honour and repute,
Whenever honour and repute are touched
Arrives at term of fury and despair,
Loses all guidance from the reason-check:
As in delirium or a frenzy-fit,
Nor fury nor despair he satiates,—no,
Not even if he attain the impossible,
O'erturn the hinges of the universe
To annihilate—not whoso caused the smart
Solely, the author simply of his pain,
But the place, the memory, *vituperii*,
O' the shame and scorn: *quia*,—says Solomon,
(The Holy Spirit speaking by his mouth
In Proverbs, the sixth chapter near the end)
—Because, the zeal and fury of a man,
Zelus et furor viri, will not spare,
Non parcet, in the day of his revenge,
In die vindictæ, nor will acquiesce,
Nec acquiescet, through a person's prayers,
Cujusdam precibus,—*nec suscipiet*,
Nor yet take, *pro redemptione*, for
Redemption, *dona plurium*, gifts of friends,

Mere money-payment to compound for ache.
Who recognizes not my client's case?
Whereto, as strangely consentaneous here,
Adduce Saint Bernard in the Epistle writ
To Robertulus, his nephew: "Too much grief,
"*Dolor quippe nimius non deliberat*,
"Does not excogitate propriety,
"*Non verecundatur*, nor knows shame at all,
"*Non consulit rationem*, nor consults
"Reason, *non dignitatis metuit*
"*Damnum*, nor dreads the loss of dignity;
"*Modum et ordinem*, order and the mode,
"*Ignorat*, it ignores:" why, trait for trait,
Was ever portrait limned so like the life?
(By Cavalier Maratta, shall I say?
I hear he's first in reputation now.)
Yes, that of Samson in the Sacred Text
That 's not so much the portrait as the man!
Samson in Gaza was the antetype
Of Guido at Rome: observe the Nazarite!
Blinded he was,—an easy thing to bear:
Intrepidly he took imprisonment,
Gyves, stripes and daily labour at the mill:
But when he found himself, i' the public place,
Destined to make the common people sport,
Disdain burned up with such an impetus

I' the breast of him that, all the man one fire,
Moriatur, roared he, let my soul's self die,
Anima mea, with the Philistines!
So, pulled down pillar, roof, and death and all,
Multosque plures interfecit, ay,
And many more he killed thus, *moriens*,
Dying, *quam vivus*, than in his whole life,
Occiderat, he ever killed before.
Are these things writ for no example, Sirs?
One instance more, and let me see who doubts!
Our Lord Himself, made all of mansuetude,
Sealing the sum of sufferance up, received
Opprobrium, contumely and buffeting
Without complaint: but when He found Himself
Touched in His honour never so little for once,
Then outbroke indignation pent before—
"*Honorem meum nemini dabo!*" "No,
"My honour I to nobody will give!"
And certainly the example so hath wrought,
That whosoever, at the proper worth,
Apprises worldly honour and repute,
Esteems it nobler to die honoured man
Beneath Mannaia, than live centuries
Disgraced in the eye o' the world. We find Saint Paul
No recreant to this faith delivered once:
"Far worthier were it that I died," cries he,

Expedit mihi magis mori, "than
"That anyone should make my glory void,"
Quam ut gloriam meam quis evacuet!
See, *ad Corinthienses:* whereupon
Saint Ambrose makes a comment with much fruit,
Doubtless my Judges long since laid to heart,
So I desist from bringing forward here.
(I can't quite recollect it.)

Have I proved
Satis superque, both enough and to spare,
That Revelation old and new admits
The natural man may effervesce in ire,
O'erflood earth, o'erfroth heaven with foamy rage,
At the first puncture to his self-respect?
Then, Sirs, this Christian dogma, this law-bud
Full-blown now, soon to bask the absolute flower
Of Papal doctrine in our blaze of day,—
Bethink you, shall we miss one promise-streak,
One doubtful birth of dawn crepuscular,
One dew-drop comfort to humanity,
Now that the chalice teems with noonday wine?
Yea, argue Molinists who bar revenge—
Referring just to what makes out our case!
Under old dispensation, argue they,
The doom of the adulterous wife was death,

Stoning by Moses' law. "Nay, stone her not,
"Put her away!" next legislates our Lord;
And last of all, "Nor yet divorce a wife!"
Ordains the Church, "she typifies ourself,
The Bride no fault shall cause to fall from Christ."
Then, as no jot nor tittle of the Law
Has passed away—which who presumes to doubt?
As not one word of Christ is rendered vain—
Which, could it be though heaven and earth should pass?
—Where do I find my proper punishment
For my adulterous wife, I humbly ask
Of my infallible Pope,—who now remits
Even the divorce allowed by Christ in lieu
Of lapidation Moses licensed me?
The Gospel checks the Law which throws the stone,
The Church tears the divorce-bill Gospel grants:
Shall wives sin and enjoy impunity?
What profits me the fulness of the days,
The final dispensation, I demand,
Unless Law, Gospel and the Church subjoin
"But who hath barred thee primitive revenge,
"Which, like fire damped and dammed up, burns more fierce?
"Use thou thy natural privilege of man,
"Else wert thou found like those old ingrate Jews,
"Despite the manna-banquet on the board,

"A-longing after melons, cucumbers,
"And such like trash of Egypt left behind!"

(There was one melon had improved our soup:
But did not Cinoncino need the rind
To make a boat with? So I seem to think.)

Law, Gospel and the Church—from these we leap
To the very last revealment, easy rule
Befitting the well-born and thorough-bred
O' the happy day we live in, not the dark
O' the early rude and acorn-eating race.
"Behold," quoth James, "we bridle in a horse
"And turn his body as we would thereby!"
Yea, but we change the bit to suit the growth,
And rasp our colt's jaw with a rugged spike
We hasten to remit our managed steed
Who wheels round at persuasion of a touch.
Civilization bows to decency,
The acknowledged use and wont: 't is manners,—mild
But yet imperative law,—which make the man.
Thus do we pay the proper compliment
To rank, and that society of Rome,
Hath so obliged us by its interest,
Taken our client's part instinctively,
As unaware defending its own cause.

What *dictum* doth Society lay down
I' the case of one who hath a faithless wife?
Wherewithal should the husband cleanse his way?
Be patient and forgive? Oh, language fails,—
Shrinks from depicturing his turpitude!
For if wronged husband raise not hue and cry,
Quod si maritus de adulterio non
Conquereretur, he 's presumed a—foh!
Presumitur leno: so, complain he must.
But how complain? At your tribunal, lords?
Far weightier challenge suits your sense, I wot!
You sit not to have gentlemen propose
Questions gentility can itself discuss.
Did not you prove that to our brother Paul?
The Abate, *quum judicialiter*
Prosequeretur, when he tried the law,
Guidonis causam, in Count Guido's case,
Accidit ipsi, this befell himself,
Quod risum moverit et cachinnos, that
He moved to mirth and cachinnation, all
Or nearly all, *fere in omnibus*
Etiam sensatis et cordatis, men
Strong-sensed, sound-hearted, nay, the very Court,
Ipsismet in judicibus, I might add,
Non tamen dicam. In a cause like this,
So multiplied were reasons *pro* and *con*,

Delicate, intertwisted and obscure,
That Law refused loan of a finger-tip
To unravel, re-adjust the hopeless twine,
Since, half-a-dozen steps outside Law's seat,
There stood a foolish trifler with a tool
A-dangle to no purpose by his side,
Had clearly cut the embroilment in a trice.
Asserunt enim unanimiter
Doctores, for the Doctors all assert,
That husbands, *quod mariti*, must be held
Viles, cornuti reputantur, vile,
Fronts branching forth a florid infamy,
Si propriis manibus, if with their own hands,
Non sumunt, they fail straight to take revenge,
Vindictam, but expect the deed be done
By the Court—*expectant illam fieri*
Per judices, qui summopere rident, which
Gives an enormous guffaw for reply,
Et cachinnantur. For he ran away,
Deliquit enim, just that he might 'scape
The censure of both counsellors and crowd,
Ut vulgi et doctorum evitaret
Censuram, and lest so he superadd
To loss of honour ignominy too,
Et sic ne istam quoque ignominiam
Amisso honori superadderet.

My lords, my lords, the inconsiderate step
Was—we referred ourselves to Law at all!
Twit me not with "Law else had punished you!"
Each punishment of the extra-legal step,
To which the high-born preferably revert,
Is ever for some oversight, some slip
I' the taking vengeance, not for vengeance' self.
A good thing, done unhandsomely, turns ill;
And never yet lacked ill the law's rebuke.
For pregnant instance, let us contemplate
The luck of Leonardus,—see at large
Of Sicily's Decisions sixty-first.
This Leonard finds his wife is false: what then?
He makes her own son snare her, and entice
Out of the town walls to a private walk
Wherein he slays her with commodity.
They find her body half-devoured by dogs:
Leonard is tried, convicted, punished, sent
To labour in the galleys seven years long:
Why? For the murder? Nay, but for the mode!
Malus modus occidendi, ruled the Court,
An ugly mode of killing, nothing more!
Another fructuous sample,—see "*De Re*
"*Criminali*," in Matthæus' divine piece.
Another husband, in no better plight,
Simulates absence, thereby tempts his wife;

On whom he falls, out of sly ambuscade,
Backed by a brother of his, and both of them
Armed to the teeth with arms that law had blamed.
Nimis dolose, overwilily,
Fuisse operatum, did they work,
Pronounced the law: had all been fairly done
Law had not found him worthy, as she did,
Of four years' exile. Why cite more? Enough
Is good as a feast—(unless a birthday-feast
For one's Cinuccio) so, we finish here.
My lords, we rather need defend ourselves
Inasmuch as, for a twinkling of an eye,
We hesitatingly appealed to law,—
Than need deny that, on mature advice,
We blushingly bethought us, bade revenge
Back to its simple proper private way
Of decent self-dealt gentlemanly death.
Judges, here is the law, and here beside,
The testimony! Look to it!
Pause and breathe!
So far is only too plain; we must watch:
Bottini will scarce hazard an attack
Here: best anticipate the fellow's play
And guard the weaker places—warily ask,
What if considerations of a sort,
Reasons of a kind, arise from out the strange

Peculiar unforeseen new circumstance
Of this our (candour owns) abnormal act,
To bar the right of us revenging so?
"Impunity were otherwise your meed:
"Go slay your wife and welcome,"—may be urged,—
"But why the innocent old couple slay,
"Pietro, Violante? You may do enough,
"Not too much, not exceed the golden mean:
"Neither brute-beast nor Pagan, Gentile, Jew,
"Nor Christian, no nor votarist of the mode,
"Is justified to push revenge so far."

No, indeed? Why, thou very sciolist!
The actual wrong, Pompilia seemed to do,
Was virtual wrong done by the parents here—
Imposing her upon us as their child—
Themselves allow: then, her fault was their fault,
Her punishment be theirs accordingly!
But wait a little, sneak not off so soon!
Was this cheat solely harm to Guido, pray?
The precious couple you call innocent,—
Why, they were felons that Law failed to clutch,
Qui ut fraudarent, who that they might rob,
Legitime vocatos, folk law called,
Ad fidei commissum, true heirs to the Trust,
Partum supposuerunt, feigned this birth,

Immemores reos factos esse, blind
To the fact that, guilty, they incurred thereby,
Ultimi supplicii, hanging or what 's worse.
Do you blame us that we turn Law's instruments,
Not mere self-seekers,—mind the public weal,
Nor make the private good our sole concern?
That having—shall I say—secured a thief,
Not simply we recover from his pouch
The stolen article our property,
But also pounce upon our neighbour's purse
We opportunely find reposing there,
And do him justice while we right ourselves?
He owes us, for our part, a drubbing say,
But owes our neighbour just a dance i' the air
Under the gallows: so, we throttle him.
That neighbour 's Law, that couple are the Thief,
We are the over ready to help Law—
Zeal of her house hath eaten us up: for which,
Can it be, Law intends to eat up us,
Crudum Priamum, devour poor Priam raw,
('T was Jupiter's own joke) with babes to boot,
Priamique pisinnos, in Homeric phrase?
Shame!——and so ends my period prettily.

But even,—prove the pair not culpable,
Free as unborn babe from connivance at,

Participation in, their daughter's fault:
Ours the mistake. Is that a rare event?
Non semel, it is anything but rare,
In contingentia facti, that by chance,
Impunes evaserunt, go scot-free,
Qui, such well-meaning people as ourselves,
Justo dolore moti, who aggrieved
With cause, *apposuerunt manus*, lay
Rough hands, *in innocentes*, on wrong heads.
Cite we an illustrative case in point:
Mulier Smirnea quædam, good my lords,
A gentlewoman lived in Smyrna once,
Virum et filium ex eo conceptum, who
Both husband and her son begot by him
Killed, *interfecerat*, *ex quo*, because,
Vir filium suum perdiderat, her spouse
Had been beforehand with her, killed her son,
Matrimonii primi, of a previous bed.
Deinde accusata, then accused,
Apud Dolabellam, before him that sat
Proconsul, *nec duabus cædibus*
Contaminatam liberare, nor
To liberate a woman doubly-dyed
With murder, *voluit*, made he up his mind,
Nec condemnare, nor to doom to death,
Justo dolore impulsam, one impelled

By just grief; *sed remisit*, but sent her up
Ad Areopagum, to the Hill of Mars,
Sapientissimorum judicum
Cœtum, to that assembly of the sage
Paralleled only by my judges here;
Ubi, cognito de causa, where, the cause
Well weighed, *responsum est*, they gave reply,
Ut ipsa et accusator, that both sides
O' the suit, *redirent*, should come back again,
Post centum annos, after a hundred years,
For judgment; *et sic*, by which sage decree,
Duplici parricidio rea, one
Convicted of a double parricide,
Quamvis etiam innocentem, though in truth
Out of the pair, one innocent at least
She, *occidisset*, plainly had put to death,
Undequaque, yet she altogether 'scaped,
Evasit impunis. See the case at length
In Valerius, fittingly styled *Maximus*,
That eighth book of his Memorable Facts.
Nor Cyriacus cites beside the mark:
Similiter uxor quæ mandaverat,
Just so, a lady who had taken care,
Homicidium viri, that her lord be killed,
Ex denegatione debiti,
For denegation of a certain debt,

Matrimonialis, he was loth to pay,
Fuit pecuniaria mulcta, was
Amerced in a pecuniary mulct,
Punita, et ad pœnam, and to pains,
Temporalem, for a certain space of time,
In monasterio, in a convent.

(Ay,
In monasterio! He mismanages
In with the ablative, the accusative!
I had hoped to have hitched the villain into verse
For a gift, this very day, a complete list
O' the prepositions each with proper case,
Telling a story, long was in my head.
"What prepositions take the accusative?
Ad to or at—*who saw the cat?*—down to
Ob, for, because of, *keep her claws off!*" Tush!
Law in a man takes the whole liberty:
The muse is fettered: just as Ovid found!)

And now, sea widens and the coast is clear.
What of the dubious act you bade excuse?
Surely things broaden, brighten, till at length
Remains—so far from act that needs defence—
Apology to make for act delayed
One minute, let alone eight mortal months

Of hesitation! "Why procrastinate?"
(Out with it my Bottinius, ease thyself!)
"Right, promptly done, is twice right: right delayed
"Turns wrong. We grant you should have killed your wife,
"But killed o' the moment, at the meeting her
"In company with the priest: then did the tongue
"O' the Brazen Head give license, 'Time is now!'
"Wait to make mind up? 'Time is past' it peals.
"Friend, you are competent to mastery
"O' the passions that confessedly explain
"An outbreak: you allow an interval,
"And then break out as if time's clock still clanged.
"You have forfeited your chance, and flat you fall
"Into the commonplace category
"Of men bound to go softly all their days,
"Obeying Law."
Now, which way make response?
What was the answer Guido gave, himself?
—That so to argue came of ignorance
How honour bears a wound. "For, wound," said he,
"My body, and the smart soon mends and ends:
"While, wound my soul where honour sits and rules.
"Longer the sufferance, stronger grows the pain,
"Being *ex incontinenti*, fresh as first."
But try another tack, urge common sense

By way of contrast: say—Too true, my lords!
We did demur, awhile did hesitate:
Since husband sure should let a scruple speak
Ere he slay wife,—for his own safety, lords!
Carpers abound in this misjudging world:
Moreover, there 's a nicety in law
That seems to justify them should they carp.
Suppose the source of injury a son,—
Father may slay such son yet run no risk:
Why graced with such a privilege? Because
A father so incensed with his own child,
Or must have reason, or believe he has:
Quia semper, seeing that in such event,
Presumitur, the law is bound suppose,
Quod capiat pater, that the sire must take,
Bonum consilium pro filio,
The best course as to what befits his boy,
Through instinct, *ex instinctu*, of mere love,
Amoris, and, *paterni*, fatherhood;
Quam confidentiam, which confidence,
Non habet, law declines to entertain,
De viro, of the husband: where finds he
An instinct that compels him love his wife?
Rather is he presumably her foe.
So, let him ponder long in this bad world
Ere do the simplest act of justice.

But
Again—and here we brush Bottini's breast—
Object you, "See the danger of delay!
"Suppose a man murdered my friend last month:
"Had I come up and killed him for his pains
"In rage, I had done right, allows the law:
"I meet him now and kill him in cold blood,
"I do wrong, equally allows the law:
"Wherein do actions differ, yours and mine?"
In plenitudine intellectus es?
Hast thy wits, Fisc? To take such slayer's life,
Returns it life to thy slain friend at all?
Had he stolen ring instead of stabbing friend,—
To-day, to-morrow or next century,
Meeting the thief, thy ring upon his thumb,
Thou justifiably hadst wrung it thence:
So, couldst thou wrench thy friend's life back again,
Though prisoned in the bosom of his foe.
Why, law would look complacent on thy wrath.
Our case is, that the thing we lost, we found:
The honour, we were robbed of eight months since,
Being recoverable at any day
By death of the delinquent. Go thy ways!
Ere thou hast learned law, will be much to do,
As said the gaby while he shod the goose.
Nay, if you urge me, interval was none!

From the inn to the villa—blank or else a bar
Of adverse and contrarious incident
Solid between us and our just revenge!
What with the priest who flourishes his blade,
The wife who like a fury flings at us,
The crowd—and then the capture, the appeal
To Rome, the journey there, the jaunting thence
To shelter at the House of Convertites,
The visits to the Villa, and so forth,
Where was one minute left us all this while
To put in execution that revenge
We planned o' the instant?—as it were, plumped down
O' the spot, some eight months since, which round sound egg,
Rome, more propitious than our nest, should hatch!
Object not, "You reached Rome on Christmas-eve,
"And, despite liberty to act at once,
"Waited a whole and indecorous week!"
Hath so the Molinism, the canker, lords,
Eaten to our bone? Is no religion left?
No care for aught held holy by the Church?
What, would you have us skip and miss those Feasts
O' the Natal Time, must we go prosecute
Secular business on a sacred day?
Should not the merest charity expect,

Setting our poor concerns aside for once,
We hurried to the song matutinal
I' the Sistine, and pressed forward for the Mass
The Cardinal that 's Camerlengo chaunts,
Then rushed on to the blessing of the Hat
And Rapier, which the Pope sends to what prince
Has done most detriment to the Infidel—
And thereby whetted courage if 't were blunt?
Meantime, allow we kept the house a week,
Suppose not we were idle in our mew!
Picture us raging here and raving there—
"'Money?' I need none. 'Friends?' The word is null.
"Restore the white was on that shield of mine
"Borne at" . . . wherever might be shield to bear.
"I see my grandsire, he who fought so well
"At" . . . here find out and put in time and place,
Or else invent the fight his grandsire fought:
"I see this! I see that!"

(See nothing else,
Or I shall scarce see lamb's fry in an hour!
What to the uncle, as I bid advance
The smoking dish? "Fry suits a tender tooth!
"Behoves we care a little for our kin—
"You, Sir,—who care so much for cousinship
"As come to your poor loving nephew's feast!"

He has the reversion of a long lease yet—
Land to bequeath! He loves lamb's fry, I know:)

Here fall to be considered those same six
Qualities; what Bottini needs must call
So many aggravations of our crime,
Parasite-growth upon mere murder's back.
We summarily might dispose of such
By some off-hand and jaunty fling, some skit—
"So, since there 's proved no crime to aggravate,
"A fico for your aggravations, Fisc!"
No,—handle mischief rather,—play with spells
Were meant to raise a spirit, and laugh the while
We show that did he rise we stand his match!
Therefore, first aggravation: we made up —
Over and above our simple murderous selves—
A regular assemblage of armed men,
Coadunatio armatorum,—ay,
Unluckily it was the very judge
That sits in judgment on our cause to-day
Who passed the law as Governor of Rome:
"Four men armed,"—though for lawful purpose, mark!
Much more for an acknowledged crime,—"shall die."
We five were armed to the teeth, meant murder too?
Why, that 's the very point that saves us, Fisc!
Let me instruct you. Crime nor done nor meant,—

You punish still who arm and congregate :
For wherefore use bad means to a good end?
Crime being meant not done,—you punish still
The means to crime, whereon you haply pounce,
Though accident have baulked them of effect.
But crime not only compassed but complete,
Meant and done too? Why, since you have the end,
Be that your sole concern, nor mind those means
No longer to the purpose! Murdered we?
(—Which, that our luck was in the present case,
Quod contigisse in præsenti casu,
Is palpable, *manibus palpatum est*—)
Make murder out against us, nothing else!
Of many crimes committed with a view
To one main crime, Law overlooks the less,
Intent upon the large. Suppose a man
Having in view commission of a theft,
Climbs the town-wall : 't is for the theft he hangs,
In case he stands convicted of such theft :
Law remits whipping, due to who clomb wall
Through bravery or wantonness alone,
Just to dislodge a daw's nest, plant a flag.
So I interpret you the manly mind
Of him about to judge both you and me,—
Our Governor, who, being no Fisc, my Fisc,
Cannot have blundered on ineptitude!

Next aggravation,—that the arms themselves
Were specially of such forbidden sort
Through shape or length or breadth, as, prompt, Law plucks
From single hand of solitary man,
Making him pay the carriage with his life:
Delatio armorum, arms against the rule,
Contra formam constitutionis, of
Pope Alexander's blessed memory.
Such are the poignards with the double prong,
Horn-like, when tines make bold the antlered buck,
Each prong of brittle glass—wherewith to stab
And break off short and so let fragment stick
Fast in the flesh to baffle surgery:
Such being the Genoese blade with hooked edge
That did us service at the villa here.
Sed parcat mihi tam eximius vir,
But,—let so rare a personage forgive,—
Fisc, thy objection is a foppery!
Thy charge runs that we killed three innocents:
Killed, dost see? Then, if killed, what matter how?
By stick or stone, by sword or dagger, tool
Long or tool short, round or triangular—
Poor slain folk find small comfort in the choice!
Means to an end, means to an end, my Fisc!
Nature cries out, "Take the first arms you find!"

Furor ministrat arma: where 's a stone?
Unde mî lapidem, where darts for me?
Unde sagittas? But subdue the bard
And rationalize a little. Eight months since,
Had we, or had we not, incurred your blame
For letting 'scape unpunished this bad pair?
I think I proved that in last paragraph!
Why did we so? Because our courage failed.
Wherefore? Through lack of arms to fight the foe:
We had no arms or merely lawful ones,
An unimportant sword and blunderbuss,
Against a foe, pollent in potency,
The *amasius*, and our vixen of a wife.
Well then, how culpably do we gird loin
And once more undertake the high emprise,
Unless we load ourselves this second time
With handsome superfluity of arms,
Since better is "too much" than "not enough,"
And "*plus non vitiat*," too much does no harm,
Except in mathematics, sages say.
Gather instruction from the parable!
At first we are advised—"A lad hath here
"Seven barley loaves and two small fishes: what
"Is that among so many?" Aptly asked:
But put that question twice and, quite as apt,
The answer is "Fragments, twelve baskets full!"

And, while we speak of superabundance, fling
We word by the way to fools who cast their flout
On Guido—"Punishment were pardoned him,
"But here the punishment exceeds offence:
"He might be just, but he was cruel too!"
Why, grant there seems a kind of cruelty
In downright stabbing people he could maim,
(If so you stigmatize the stern and strict)
Still, Guido meant no cruelty—may plead
Transgression of his mandate, over-zeal
O' the part of his companions: all he craved
Was, they should fray the faces of the folk,
Merely disfigure, nowise make them die.
Solummodo fassus est, he owns no more,
Dedisse mandatum, than that he desired,
Ad sfrisiandum, *dicam*, that they hack
And hew, i' the customary phrase, his wife,
Uxorem tantum, and no harm beside.
If his instructions then be misconceived,
Nay, disobeyed, impute you blame to him?
Cite me no Panicollus to the point,
As adverse! Oh, I quite expect his case—
How certain noble youths of Sicily
Having good reason to mistrust their wives,
Killed them and were absolved in consequence:
While others who had gone beyond the need

By mutilation of each paramour—
As Galba in the Horatian satire grieved
—These were condemned to the galleys, cast for guilt
Exceeding simple murder of a wife.
But why? Because of ugliness, and not
Cruelty, in the said revenge, I trow!
Ex causa abscissionis partium;
Qui nempe id facientes reputantur
Naturæ inimici, man revolts
Against them as the natural enemy.
Pray, grant to one who meant to slit the nose
And slash the cheek and slur the mouth, at most,
A somewhat more humane award than these
Obtained, these natural enemies of man!
Objectum funditus corruit, flat you fall,
My Fisc! I waste no kick on you, but pass.

Third aggravation: that our act was done—
Not in the public street, where safety lies,
Not in the bye-place, caution may avoid,
Wood, cavern, desert, spots contrived for crime,—
But in the very house, home, nook and nest,
O' the victims, murdered in their dwelling-place,
In domo ac habitatione propria,
Where all presumably is peace and joy.
The spider, crime, pronounce we twice a pest

When, creeping from congenial cottage, she
Taketh hold with her hands, to horrify
His household more, i' the palace of the king.
All three were housed and safe and confident.
Moreover, the permission that our wife
Should have at length *domum pro carcere*,
Her own abode in place of prison—why,
We ourselves granted, by our other self
And proxy Paolo: did we make such grant,
Meaning a lure?—elude the vigilance
O' the jailor, lead her to commodious death,
While we ostensibly relented?
Ay,
Just so did we, nor otherwise, my Fisc!
Is vengeance lawful? We demand our right,
But find it will be questioned or refused
By jailor, turnkey, hangdog,—what know we?
Pray, how is it we should conduct ourselves?
To gain our private right—break public peace,
Do you bid us?—trouble order with our broils?
Endanger . . shall I shrink to own . . ourselves?—
Who want no broken head nor bloody nose
(While busied slitting noses, breaking heads)
From the first tipstaff that may interfere!
Nam quicquid sit, for howsoever it be,
An de consensu nostro, if with leave

Or not, *a monasterio*, from the nuns,
Educta esset, she had been led forth,
Potuimus id dissimulare, we
May well have granted leave in pure pretence,
Ut aditum habere, that thereby
An entry we might compass, a free move
Potuissemus, to her easy death,
Ad eam occidendam. Privacy
O' the hearth, and sanctitude of home, say you?
Shall we give man's abode more privilege
Than God's?—for in the churches where He dwells,
In quibus assistit Regum Rex, by means
Of His essence, *per essentiam*, all the same,
Et nihilominus, therein, *in eis*,
Ex justa via delinquens, whoso dares
To take a liberty on ground enough,
Is pardoned, *excusatur:* that 's our case—
Delinquent through befitting cause. You hold,
To punish a false wife in her own house
Is graver than, what happens every day,
To hale a debtor from his hiding-place
In church protected by the Sacrament?
To this conclusion have I brought my Fisc?
Foxes have holes, and fowls o' the air their nests;
Praise you the impiety that follows, Fisc?
Shall false wife yet have where to lay her head?

"*Contra Fiscum definitum est!*" He 's done!
"*Surge et scribe,*" make a note of it!
—If I may dally with Aquinas' word.

Or in the death-throe does he mutter still,
Fourth aggravation, that we changed our garb,
And rusticized ourselves with uncouth hat,
Rough vest and goatskin wrappage; murdered thus
Mutatione vestium, in disguise,
Whereby mere murder got complexed with wile,
Turned *homicidium ex insidiis?* Fisc,
How often must I round thee in the ears—
All means are lawful to a lawful end?
Concede he had the right to kill his wife:
The Count indulged in a travesty; why?
De illa ut vindictam sumeret,
That on her he might lawful vengeance take,
Commodius, with more ease, *et tutius*,
And safelier: wants he warrant for the step?
Read to thy profit how the Apostle once
For ease and safety, when Damascus raged,
Was let down in a basket by the wall
To 'scape the malice of the governor
(Another sort of Governor boasts Rome!)
—Many are of opinion,—covered close,
Concealed with—what except that very cloak

He left behind at Troas afterward?
I shall not add a syllable: Molinists may!
Well, have we more to manage? Ay, indeed!
Fifth aggravation, that our wife reposed
Sub potestate judicis, beneath
Protection of the judge,—her house was styled
A prison, and his power became its guard
In lieu of wall and gate and bolt and bar.
This is a tough point, shrewd, redoubtable:
Because we have to supplicate that judge
Shall overlook wrong done the judgment-seat.
Now, I might suffer my own nose be pulled,
As man: but then as father . . . if the Fisc
Touched one hair of my boy who held my hand
In confidence he could not come to harm
Crossing the Corso, at my own desire,
Going to see those bodies in the church—
What would you say to that, Don Hyacinth?
This is the sole and single knotty point:
For, bid Tommati blink his interest,
You laud his magnanimity the while:
But baulk Tommati's office,—he talks big!
"My predecessors in the place,—those sons
"O' the prophets that may hope succeed me
here,—
"Shall I diminish their prerogative?

"Count Guido Franceschini's honour!—well,
"Has the Governor of Rome none?"

You perceive,
The cards are all against us. Make a push,
Kick over table, as shrewd gamesters do!
We, do you say, encroach upon the rights,
Deny the omnipotence o' the Judge forsooth?
We, who have only been from first to last
Intending that his purpose should prevail,
Nay more, at times, anticipating it
At risk of his rebuke?

But wait awhile!
Cannot we lump this with the sixth and last
Of the aggravations—that the Majesty
O' the Sovereign here received a wound? to-wit,
Læsa Majestas, since our violence
Was out of envy to the course of law,
In odium litis? We cut short thereby
Three pending suits, promoted by ourselves
I' the main,—which worsens crime, *accedit ad*
Exasperationem criminis!

Yes, here the eruptive wrath with full effect!
How, did not indignation chain my tongue,

Could I repel this last, worst charge of all!
(There is a porcupine to barbacue;
Gigia can jug a rabbit well enough,
With sour-sweet sauce and pine-pips; but, good Lord,
Suppose the devil instigate the wench
To stew, not roast him? Stew my porcupine?
If she does, I know where his quills shall stick!
Come, I must go myself and see to things:
I cannot stay much longer stewing here.)
Our stomach . . . I mean, our soul is stirred within.
And we want words. We wounded Majesty?
Fall under such a censure, we?—who yearned
So much that Majesty dispel the cloud
And shine on us with healing on her wings,
That we prayed Pope *Majestas*' very self
To anticipate a little the tardy pack,
Bell us forth deep the authoritative bay
Should start the beagles into sudden yelp
Unisonous,—and, Gospel leading Law,
Grant there assemble in our own behoof
A Congregation, a particular Court,
A few picked friends of quality and place,
To hear the several matters in dispute,—
Causes big, little and indifferent,
Bred of our marriage like a mushroom-growth,—
All at once (can one brush off such too soon?)

And so with laudable despatch decide
Whether we, in the main (to sink detail)
Were one the Pope should hold fast or let go.
"What, take the credit from the Law?" you ask?
Indeed, we did! Law ducks to Gospel here:
Why should Law gain the glory and pronounce
A judgment shall immortalize the Pope?
Yes: our self-abnegating policy
Was Joab's—we would rouse our David's sloth,
Bid him encamp against a city, sack
A place whereto ourselves had long laid siege,
Lest, taking it at last, it take our name
Nor be styled *Innocentinopolis.*
But no! The modesty was in alarm,
The temperance refused to interfere,
Returned us our petition with the word
"*Ad judices suos*," "Leave him to his Judge!"
As who should say "Why trouble my repose?
"Why consult Peter in a simple case,
"Peter's wife's sister in her fever-fit
"Might solve as readily as the Apostle's self?
"Are my Tribunals posed by aught so plain?
"Hath not my Court a conscience? It is of age,
"Ask it!"

We do ask,—but, inspire reply

To the Court thou bidst me ask, as I have asked—
Oh thou, who vigilantly dost attend
To even the few, the ineffectual words
Which rise from this our low and mundane sphere
Up to thy region out of smoke and noise,
Seeking corroboration from thy nod
Who art all justice—which means mercy too,
In a low noisy smoky world like ours
Where Adam's sin made peccable his seed!
We venerate the father of the flock,
Whose last faint sands of life, the frittered gold,
Fall noiselessly, yet all too fast, o' the cone
And tapering heap of those collected years:
Never have these been hurried in their flow,
Though justice fain would jog reluctant arm,
In eagerness to take the forfeiture
Of guilty life: much less shall mercy sue
In vain that thou let innocence survive,
Precipitate no minim of the mass
O' the all-so precious moments of thy life,
By pushing Guido into death and doom!

(Our Cardinal engages to go read
The Pope my speech, and point its beauties out.
They say, the Pope has one half-hour, in twelve,
Of something like a moderate return

Of the intellectuals,—never much to lose:
If I adroitly plant this passage there,
The Fisc will find himself forestalled, I think,
Though he stand, beat till the old ear-drum break!
—Ah, boy of my own bowels, Hyacinth,
Wilt ever catch the knack, requite the pains
Of poor papa, become proficient too
I' the how and why and when, the time to laugh,
The time to weep, the time, again, to pray,
And all the times prescribed by Holy Writ?
Well, well, we fathers can but care, but cast
Our bread upon the waters!)
In a word,
These secondary charges go to ground,
Since secondary, and superfluous,—motes
Quite from the main point: we did all and some,
Little and much, adjunct and principal,
Causa honoris. Is there such a cause
As the sake of honour? By that sole test try
Our action, nor demand if more or less,
Because of the action's mode, we merit blame
Or may-be deserve praise! The Court decides.
Is the end lawful? It allows the means:
What we may do, we may with safety do,
And what means "safety" we ourselves must judge.
Put case a person wrongs me past dispute:

If my legitimate vengeance be a blow,
Mistrusting my bare arm can deal that blow,
I claim co-operation of a stick;
Doubtful if stick be tough, I crave a sword;
Diffident of ability in fence,
I fee a friend, a swordsman to assist:
Take one—he may be coward, fool or knave:
Why not take fifty?—and if these exceed
I' the due degree of drubbing, whom accuse
But the first author of the aforesaid wrong
Who put poor me to such a world of pains?
Surgery would have just excised a wart;
The patient made such pother, struggled so
That the sharp instrument sliced nose and all.
Taunt us not that our friends performed for pay!
Ourselves had toiled for simple honour's sake:
But country clowns want dirt they comprehend,
The piece of gold! Our reasons, which suffice
Ourselves, be ours alone; our piece of gold
Be, to the rustic, reason he approves!
We must translate our motives like our speech,
Into the lower phrase that suits the sense
O' the limitedly apprehensive. Let
Each level have its language! Heaven speaks first
To the angel, then the angel tames the word
Down to the ear of Tobit: he, in turn,

Diminishes the message to his dog,
And finally that dog finds how the flea
(Which else, importunate, might check his speed)
Shall learn its hunger must have holiday
By application of his tongue or paw:
So many varied sorts of language here,
Each following each with pace to match the step,
Haud passibus æquis!

Talking of which flea,
Reminds me I must put in special word
For the poor humble following,—the four friends,
Sicarii, our assassins caught and caged.
Ourselves are safe in your approval now:
Yet must we care for our companions, plead
The cause o' the poor, the friends (of old-world faith)
Who lie in tribulation for our sake.
Pauperum Procurator is my style:
I stand forth as the poor man's advocate:
And when we treat of what concerns the poor,
Et cum agatur de pauperibus,
In bondage, *carceratis*, for their sake,
In eorum causis, natural piety,
Pietas, ever ought to win the day,
Triumphare debet, quia ipsi sunt,
Because those very paupers constitute,

Thesaurus Christi, all the wealth of Christ.
Nevertheless I shall not hold you long
With multiplicity of proofs, nor burn
Candle at noon-tide, clarify the clear.
There beams a case refulgent from our books—
Castrensis, Butringarius, everywhere
I find it burn to dissipate the dark.
'T is this: a husband had a friend, which friend
Seemed to him over-friendly with his wife
In thought and purpose,—I pretend no more.
To justify suspicion or dispel,
He bids his wife make show of giving heed,
Semblance of sympathy—propose, in fine,
A secret meeting in a private place.
The friend, enticed thus, finds an ambuscade,
To-wit, the husband posted with a pack
Of other friends, who fall upon the first
And beat his love and life out both at once.
These friends were brought to question for their help;
Law ruled "The husband being in the right,
"Who helped him in the right can scarce be wrong"—
Opinio, an opinion every way,
Multum tenenda cordi, heart should hold!
When the inferiors follow as befits
The lead o' the principal, they change their name,
And, *non dicuntur*, are no longer called

His mandatories, *mandatorii*,
But helpmates, *sed auxiliatores ;* since
To that degree does honour' sake lend aid,
Adeo honoris causa est efficax,
That not alone, *non solum*, does it pour
Itself out, *se diffundat*, on mere friends
We bring to do our bidding of this sort,
In mandatorios simplices, but sucks
Along with it in wide and generous whirl,
Sed etiam assassinii qualitate
Qualificatos, people qualified
By the quality of assassination's self,
Dare I make use of such neologism,
Ut utar verbo.

Haste we to conclude.
Of the other points that favour, leave some few
For Spreti ; such as the delinquents' youth.
One of them falls short, by some months, of age
Fit to be managed by the gallows ; two
May plead exemption from our law's award,
Being foreigners, subjects of the Granduke—
I spare that bone to Spreti, and reserve
Myself the juicier breast of argument—
Flinging the breast-blade i' the face o' the Fisc
Who furnished me the tid-bit : he must needs

Play off his privilege and rack the clowns,—
And they, at instance of the rack, confess
All four unanimously made resolve,—
The night o' the murder, in brief minute snatched
Behind the back of Guido as he fled,—
That, since he had not kept his promise, paid
The money for the murder on the spot,
So, reaching home again, might please ignore
The pact or pay them in improper coin,—
They one and all resolved, these hopeful friends,
'T were best inaugurate the morrow's light,
Nature recruited with her due repose,
By killing Guido as he lay asleep
Pillowed on wallet which contained their fee.

I thank the Fisc for knowledge of this fact:
What fact could hope to make more manifest
Their rectitude, Guido's integrity?
For who fails recognize the touching truth
That these poor rustics bore no envy, hate,
Malice nor yet uncharitableness
Against the people they had put to death?
In them, did such an act reward itself?
All done was to deserve the simple pay,
Obtain the bread clowns earn by sweat of brow,
And missing which, they missed of everything—

Hence claimed pay, even at expense of life
To their own lord, so little warped (admire!)
By prepossession, such the absolute
Instinct of equity in rustic souls!
Whereas our Count, the cultivated mind,
He, wholly rapt in his serene regard
Of honour, he contemplating the sun
Who hardly marks if taper blink below,—
He, dreaming of no argument for death
Except a vengeance worthy noble hearts,—
Dared not so desecrate the deed, forsooth,
Vulgarize vengeance, as defray its cost
By money dug from out the dirty earth,
Irritant mere, in Ovid's phrase, to ill.
What though he lured base hinds by lucre's hope,—
The only motive they could masticate,
Milk for babes, not strong meat which men require?
The deed done, those coarse hands were soiled enough,
He spared them the pollution of the pay.
So much for the allegement, thine, my Fisc,
Quo nil absurdius, than which nought more mad,
Excogitari potest, may be squeezed
From out the cogitative brain of thee!
And now, thou excellent the Governor!
(Push to the peroration) *cæterum*
Enixe supplico, I strive in prayer,

Ut dominis meis, that unto the Court,
Benigna fronte, with a gracious brow,
Et oculis serenis, and mild eyes,
Perpendere placeat, it may please them weigh,
Quod dominus Guido, that our noble Count,
Occidit, did the killing in dispute,
Ut ejus honor tumulatus, that
The honour of him buried fathom-deep
In infamy, *in infamia*, might arise,
Resurgeret, as ghost breaks sepulchre!
Occidit, for he killed, *uxorem*, wife,
Quia illi fuit, since she was to him,
Opprobrio, a disgrace and nothing more!
Et genitores, killed her parents too,
Qui, who, *postposita verecundia*,
Having thrown off all sort of decency,
Filiam repudiarunt, had renounced
Their daughter, *atque declarare non*
Erubuerunt, nor felt blush tinge cheek,
Declaring, *meretricis genitam*
Esse, she was the offspring of a drab,
Ut ipse dehonestaretur, just
That so himself might lose his social rank!
Cujus mentem, and which daughter's heart and soul,
They, *perverterunt*, turned from the right course,
Et ad illicitos amores non

Dumtaxat pellexerunt, and to love
Not simply did alluringly incite,
Sed vi obedientiæ, but by force
O' the duty, *filialis*, daughters owe,
Coegerunt, forced and drove her to the deed:
Occidit, I repeat he killed the clan,
Ne scilicet amplius in dedecore,
Lest peradventure longer life might trail,
Viveret, link by link his turpitude,
Invisus consanguineis, hateful so
To kith and kindred, *a nobilibus*
Notatus, shunned by men of quality,
Relictus ab amicis, left i' the lurch
By friends, *ab omnibus derisus*, turned
A common hack-block to try edge of jokes.
Occidit, and he killed them here in Rome,
In Urbe, the Eternal City, Sirs,
Nempe quæ alias spectata est,
The appropriate theatre which witnessed once.
Matronam nobilem, Lucretia's self,
Abluere pudicitiæ maculas,
Wash off the spots of her pudicity,
Sanguine proprio, with her own pure blood;
Quæ vidit, and which city also saw,
Patrem, Virginius, *undequaque*, quite,
Impunem, with no sort of punishment,

Nor, *et non illaudatum*, lacking praise,
Sed polluentem parricidio,
Imbrue his hands with butchery, *filiæ*,
Of chaste Virginia, to avoid a rape,
Ne raperetur ad stupra ; so to heart,
Tanti illi cordi fuit, did he take,
Suspicio, the mere fancy men might have,
Honoris amittendi, of fame's loss,
Ut potius voluerit filia
Orbari, he preferred to lose his child,
Quam illa incederet, rather than she walk
The ways an, *inhonesta*, child disgraced,
Licet non sponte, though against her will.
Occidit—killed them, I reiterate—
In propria domo, in their own abode,
Ut adultera et parentes, that each wretch,
Conscii agnoscerent, might both see and say,
Nullum locum, there's no place, *nullumque esse*
Asylum, nor yet refuge of escape,
Impenetrabilem, shall serve as bar,
Honori læso, to the wounded one
In honour ; *neve ibi opprobria*
Continuarentur, killed them on the spot,
Moreover, dreading lest within those walls
The opprobrium peradventure be prolonged,
Et domus quæ testis fuit turpium,

And that the domicile which witnessed crime,
Esset et pœnæ, might watch punishment:
Occidit, killed, I round you in the ears,
Quia alio modo, since by other mode,
Non poterat ejus existimatio,
There was no possibility his fame,
Læsa, gashed griesly, *tam enormiter*,
Ducere cicatrices, might be healed:
Occidit ut exemplum præberet
Uxoribus, killed her, so to lesson wives
Jura conjugii, that the marriage-oath,
Esse servanda, must be kept henceforth:
Occidit denique, killed her, in a word,
Ut pro posse honestus viveret,
That he, please God, might creditably live,
Sin minus, but if fate willed otherwise,
Proprii honoris, of his outraged fame,
Offensi, by Mannaia, if you please,
Commiseranda victima caderet,
The pitiable victim he should fall!

Done! I' the rough, i' the rough! But done! And, lo,
Landed and stranded lies my very speech,
My miracle, my monster of defence—
Leviathan into the nose whereof
I have put fish-hook, pierced his jaw with thorn,

And given him to my maidens for a play!
I' the rough: to-morrow I review my piece,
Tame here and there undue floridity.
It 's hard: you have to plead before these priests
And poke at them with Scripture, or you pass
For heathen and, what 's worse, for ignorant
O' the quality o' the Court and what it likes
By way of illustration of the law.
To-morrow stick in this, and throw out that,
And, having first ecclesiasticized,
Regularize the whole, next emphasize,
Then latinize, and lastly Cicero-ize,
Giving my Fisc his finish. There 's my speech!
And where 's my fry, and family and friends?
Where 's that huge Hyacinth I mean to hug
Till he cries out, "*Jam satis!* Let me breathe!"
Now, what an evening have I earned to-day!
Hail, ye true pleasures, all the rest are false!
Oh the old mother, oh the fattish wife!
Rogue Hyacinth shall put on paper toque,
And wrap himself around with mamma's veil
Done up to imitate papa's black robe,
(I 'm in the secret of the comedy,—
Part of the program leaked out long ago!)
And call himself the Advocate o' the Poor,
Mimic Don father that defends the Count:

And for reward shall have a small full glass
Of manly red rosolio to himself,
—Always provided that he conjugate
Bibo, I drink, correctly—nor be found
Make the *perfectum*, *bipsi*, as last year!
How the ambitious do so harden heart
As lightly hold by these home-sanctitudes,
To me is matter of bewilderment—
Bewilderment! Because ambition's range
Is nowise tethered by domestic tie.
Am I refused an outlet from my home
To the world's stage?—whereon a man should play
The man in public, vigilant for law,
Zealous for truth, a credit to his kind,
Nay,—since, employing talent so, I yield
The Lord His own again with usury,—
A satisfaction, yea, to God Himself!
Well, I have modelled me by Agur's wish,
"Remove far from me vanity and lies,
"Feed me with food convenient for me!" What
I' the world should a wise man require beyond?
Can I but coax the good fat little wife
To tell her fool of a father the mad prank
His scapegrace nephew played this time last year
At Carnival! He could not choose, I think,
But modify that inconsiderate gift

O' the cup and cover (somewhere in the will
Under the pillow, someone seems to guess)
—Correct that clause in favour of a boy
The trifle ought to grace, with name engraved,
Would look so well, produced in future years
To pledge a memory, when poor papa
Latin and law are long since laid at rest—
Hyacintho dono dedit avus! Why,
The wife should get a necklace for her pains,
The very pearls that made Violante proud,
And Pietro pawned for half their value once,—
Redeemable by somebody, *ne sit*
Marita quæ rotundioribus
Onusta mammis . . . baccis ambulet:
Her bosom shall display the big round balls,
No braver proudly borne by wedded wife!
With which Horatian promise I conclude.

Into the pigeon-hole with thee, my speech!
Off and away, first work then play, play, play!
Bottini, burn thy books, thou blazing ass!
Sing "Tra-la-la, for, lambkins, we must live!"

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